DECEMBER 27, 1999

After Seattle · William Greider

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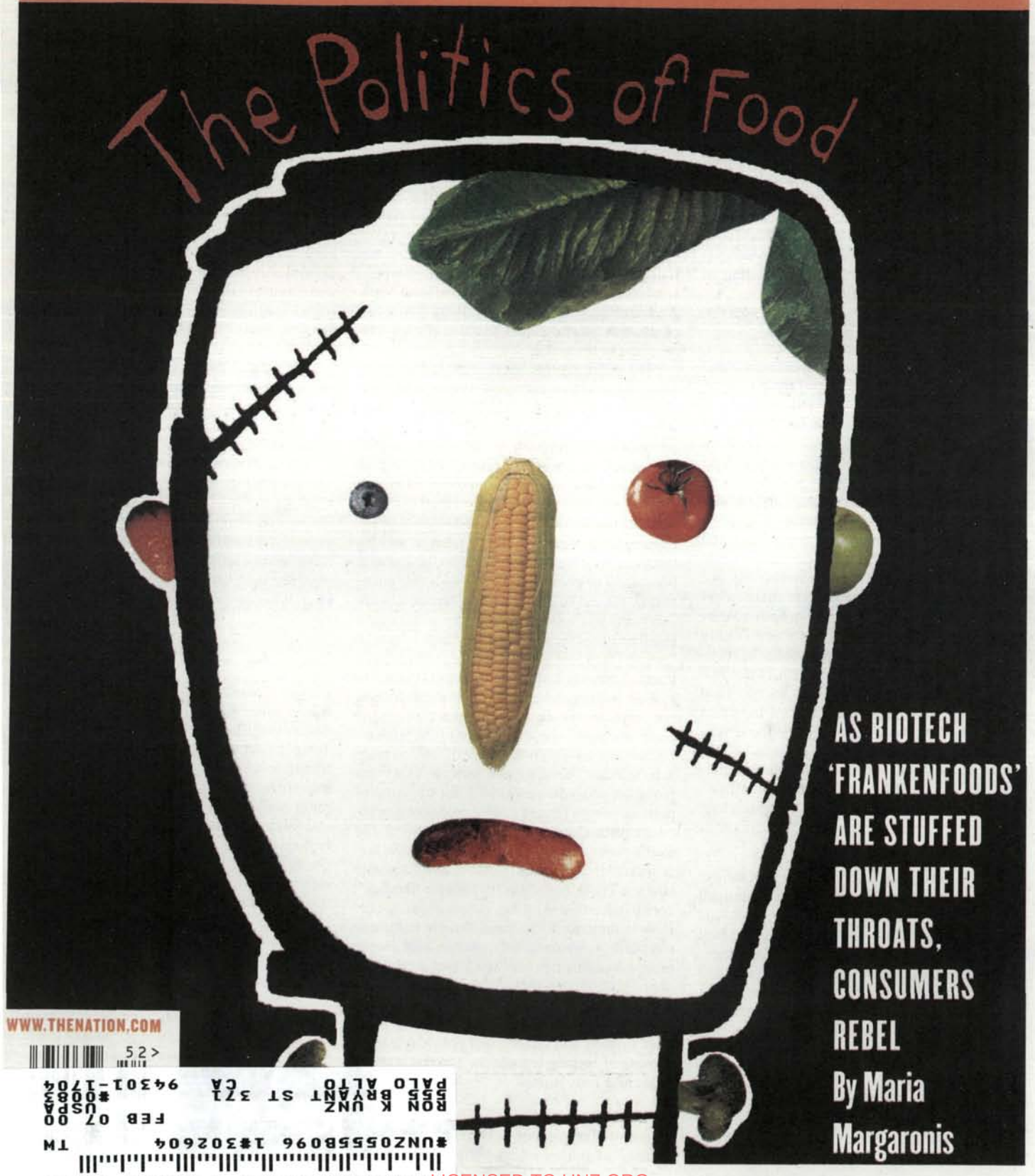

AS BIOTECH 'FRANKENFOODS' ARE STUFFED DOWN THEIR THROATS, CONSUMERS REBEL

By Maria Margaronis

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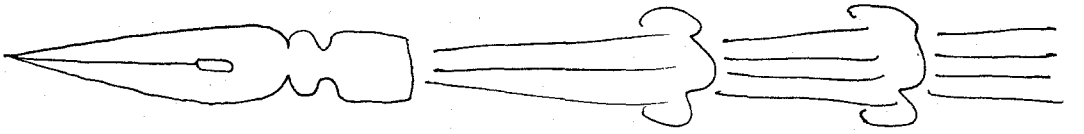

EUGENE MIHAESCO

Punk, Progressive & Political

Chicago

■ How nice it was to see Johnny Temple's "Noise From Underground" [Oct. 18]. As someone who considers herself punk and politically active I have always been wary of media coverage of the two. I have been involved with everything from Riot Grrrlz to setting up some of the Voices in the Wilderness benefits mentioned in the article—and rarely have I read anything that I thought was as accurate, fair, enlightened, broad-based and truly understanding of the history of the political punk world.

JESSICA HOPPER

Tucson, Ariz.

■ I happened across Johnny Temple's article and was thrilled. As my husband and I try to raise an enlightened child in a society still in the Dark Ages, we're trying to impart to her the passion we found on the punk scene—which is far more than the music. It was on the punk scene that I was first introduced to Noam Chomsky, where I saw people creating their own art and politics without any help from the "experts." The left—not liberals, but the *real* left—ignores a vast well of informed, creative, highly political people ranging in age from their teens to their 40s. All too often, even progressives get their information about countercultures from *Spin*, so they have no idea what's really out there. Young women have no need for or knowledge of feminism, we're told; Kathleen Hanna is but one example that counters that. Truly independent media, whether publishers, record labels or whatever, can't survive for long without selling out; but look at Alternative Tentacles and Dischord. What the media, often even the "progressive" media, tell us cannot be is still alive—just as punk is, premature obits notwithstanding.

KIMBERLY DOSS-CORTES

Kent, Ohio

■ It was a thrill to see Johnny Temple's article, but I wish he had mentioned the international network based in Columbus called Anti-Racist Action. Its publication, *ARA News*, is the best zine of its kind in the country, and it pays attention to the punk culture. ARA has had nearly a thousand bands perform across the nation for benefits. The twenty-one band ARA benefit CD is a taste of punk, ska (and swing!), political consciousness and Jello Biafra. LORENA FULLER

Highland Park, N.J.

■ As the unmentioned co-founder of Positive Force, imagine my surprise to read Johnny Temple's statement, "That year [1985] a group of local independent music fans and musicians founded a nonprofit organization, Positive Force, to pursue their political goals." The fact is that Positive Force was founded, in large part, by high school student activists who were searching for meaningful political engagement after the demise of the New Left (many of them were never punkers). This cohort of activists was involved in the antinuclear and the anti-interventionist movements of the eighties. We founded the group to network high school activists who felt isolated by the overwhelmingly conservative Reagan era. We joined with Mark Andersen and believed that punk offered some of the energy and values that Temple tried to describe in his article.

The point matters because these young activists eventually left Positive Force. Why? Because the organization, under Andersen's leadership, began focusing exclusively on punk rock concerts and fundraising. We felt that this forced us to become a sort of exclusive in-group of punks (besides, some of our members liked Bob Dylan and classical music more than hardcore punk). After about 1986 or so, the original group disintegrated, leaving behind Andersen and his vision of what the group should be (and what it became). The point is this: Punk and other countercultural and youth subcultural expressions are *inherently* exclusive. They tend toward creating small bands of the self-anointed, those who seek "purity" from the corrupt outside world. They wind up creating a niche for marketers to cater to in their endless search for the new thing. Indeed, our corporate society *encourages* acts of inarticulate rebellion—the angry sneer of the punk rebellion finds itself on the cover of fashion magazines today. Perhaps punk rock isn't the right place for progressives to look for meaningful politics, *contra* Temple's naïve pronouncements.

Stephen Duncombe and the editors of *The Baffler* have it right: Countercultural rebellion is increasingly meaningless in our corporate society. That's not to say that people shouldn't create independent music, but we shouldn't believe in their ability to transform our culture or our politics. A successful movement for a more progressive America won't be found in the three-chord wonders of tomorrow. It will be found in the work of community activists, writers and thinkers who can articulate something more than slogans and chants, and political leaders capable of crafting legislation. The rest is gravy, or should I say noise? KEVIN MATTSON

San Francisco

■ Johnny Temple not only misconstrues the motives of punk rockers but also attempts to pull us into the diseased game of democratic politics. Temple is out of touch with what punk is today—his examples of punk culture are limited to bands and events from the eighties and earlier—the only current references involve Fugazi and Rage Against the Machine, neither of whom can be considered "underground" without a mighty stretch of the imagination.

The individuals of the punk community do not and will not play the games of society and rock music. We do not wish prominence or fame of any kind. There is a reason we have always been "doomed to political obscurity"—it is because that is the way we want it and the way we will continue to keep it. We have no interest in allying ourselves with the progressive establishment, to "stem the rightward drift of American politics" or even in "fostering healthy, democratic community." We have no desire to support in any way the political, social and economic systems imposed on us from birth. Any punks involved in political activism do so as individuals and not as representatives of "punk politics."

We have no conventional "political agenda." The community that has evolved over the decades is a mode of survival and a means of enjoying life. Any attempts by well-intentioned progressives and their ilk to assimilate us into their "democracy" will be met by laughs and possibly hostility. We will not participate in your dying society.

RAHSAN EKEDAL, EMILY FOX, ANTONIO ROMAN-ALCALA, GABRIEL RAMOS, TANIA PADILLA

Flower Mound, Tex.

■ I've read Johnny Temple's article and John Strausbaugh's criticism of it in the *NY Press*. Temple's article is an accurate and inspiring tribute to the many punk bands that have contributed to activist causes. I found Strausbaugh's retort baffling. He starts off with name-calling and follows by claiming that punk activism really does not exist in any seriously influential capacity because, well, because he says so. Temple provided so many examples of punk activism that I can only assume that Strausbaugh doesn't want to believe the activism exists.

Temple brings to light how crucial activism is to the nature and origin of these bands. I've read so many ridiculous articles that have critically compared Bikini Kill to PJ Harvey musically, or NOW politically, completely overlooking the relevance or unique purpose of the Riot Grrrlz scene. Temple's is one of the few articles to recognize what Bikini Kill was attempting to do as well as to acknowledge that there was a need for what they offered. They, like many other punk bands, seemed driven by a desire to

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EDITORIALS

Democracy Bites the WTO

During the Battle in Seattle, The Nation *and The Nation Institute kept a high profile, deploying a contingent of staff and contributors and helping to stage one of the best-received events of the week, a debate on "Globalization and the World Trade Organization," which was carried on C-SPAN.* RadioNation *provided daily reports from the scene, broadcast on dozens of public radio stations. (The debate and* RadioNation *reports can be heard at www.thenation.com.)* Nation *reporters Marc Cooper, Doug Henwood and John Nichols and associate publisher Peter Rothberg put together this report.*

Seattle

If there were still doubts about the coalition forged in the heat of the Battle in Seattle, they were swept away by the almost impromptu closing march of the contentious week. Organizing overnight, the King County Central Labor Council brought 5,000 high-spirited marchers out at noon on December 3 with two objectives: to violate the city's downtown "no protest" zone and to show solidarity with the hundreds of peaceful demonstrators still in jail. A rumbling Teamster semi-tractor-trailer with a sign reading FREE THE SEATTLE 600 headed a procession that mixed longshoremen and sheet-metal workers with Earth First!-ers, bearded rabbis with a contingent of bare-breasted Lesbian Avengers—all chanting with one voice: "This Is What Democracy Looks Like!"

There was no better symbol of this new union/activist alliance than a moment at the labor rally preceding the march when the mikes suddenly went dead. As a bullhorn was being pressed into ineffectual service, a small group of black-clad protesters—looking much like the "Oregon anarchists" who had attacked the Gap and Starbucks—went to the stage with a sound system. It appeared that tensions could spill over if they were to broadcast their more provocative message. But they merely offered the use of their equipment to the assembled group of faith-based activists, union leaders and nonviolent protesters.

Machinists and antilogging activists didn't just march together, they learned from each other. "I used to say the most beautiful thing in the world was a redwood deck," said Cory McKinley, a six-foot-one, 275-pound steelworker from Spokane at the front of the Friday march. "Now, after hanging out with these green kids, I know there's another way to do this. We can preserve the old-growth trees. We can have sustainability. I guess I'm an environmentalist now." Is this the fabled red-green alliance seen in Europe but a leftist fantasy here? Steelworkers president George Becker wasn't dismissing the prospect: "We're seeing real coalitions built here that aren't going to disappear when we leave Seattle."

Seattle was indeed a milestone for a new kind of politics. Splits between labor and environmentalists, young and old, were not merely forgotten, they were actively overcome. Aging boomers marveled at the intelligence, discipline and imagination of a generation they had written off as slackers. Labor shed its nationalism for a new rhetoric of internationalism and solidarity. Progressives replaced their apologetic demeanor of the past twenty years with confidence, style and wit. Environmentalists paraded through the streets with a fifteen-foot condom bearing the slogan, WTO—PRACTICE SAFE TRADE. Direct Action Network cadres confronted WTO delegates in the streets, convincing a nattily dressed representative from the Dominican Republic to

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The Nation (ISSN 0027-8378) is published weekly (except for the second week in January, and biweekly the third week of July through the third week of September) by The Nation Company, L.P. © 1999 in the U.S.A. by The Nation Company, L.P., 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003. (212) 209-5400. Washington Bureau: Suite 308, 110 Maryland Avenue N.E., Washington, DC 20002. (202) 546-2239. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. International Telex: 667 155 NATION. Subscription orders, changes of address and all subscription inquiries: The Nation, PO Box 55149, Boulder, CO 80322-5149, or call 1-800-333-8536. Subscription Price: 1 year, $52; 2 years, $90. Add $18 for surface mail postage outside U.S. **Please allow 4-6 weeks for receipt of your first issue and for all subscription transactions.** Back issues $4 prepaid ($5 foreign) from: The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003. The Nation is available on microfilm from: University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Nation, PO Box 55149, Boulder, CO 80322-5149. This issue went to press on December 8. Printed in U.S.A. on recycled paper.

INTERNET: The Nation is available on Thursday by 12:00 midnight Eastern Time, at www.thenation.com
E-MAIL: info@thenation.com. Letters to the Editor: letters@thenation.com.

join them in chanting "Hell no, WTO!" Drawing as much from The Clash, Fugazi and the Riot Grrrlz as from Bakunin, Marx or SDS, the courageous Direct Action protesters—many of them students—represented the closing of the sixties divide between cultural activists and politicos. And with their cell phones, camcorders, coalition-building and courage, who knows where this movement can go?

At least a thousand—maybe three or four times that number—battle-hardened organizers, fresh from a week of standing-room-only teach-ins, seminars and debates, will return home and, in the words of Ralph Nader, "decentralize this fight across the nation." The Administration's proposal for most-favored-nation status for China, considered a slam-dunk two weeks before Seattle, may now be a long shot. Ditto any proposal to fast-track the expansion of NAFTA. Meanwhile, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has called for a review of WTO policies to insure that they comply with international human rights treaties, and populist Congressman Dennis Kucinich has already signed up 113 House Democrats to demand a renegotiation of all WTO agreements with the goal of linking trade to workers' rights. Nader has promised to make the WTO an issue in next year's Congressional races. Protests led by Seattle battle veterans could push the issue into the presidential campaign, and if the unions are angry enough, they could pressure Gore to embrace their goals or lose their endorsement.

As a result of Seattle, it's likely that genetic modification of food—a huge issue in Europe but not in the States, until now—will move up the agenda. GENETICALLY MODIFY THE WTO, declared posters in the streets. French farmer José Bové handed out organic cheese outside a McDonald's, and former Texas Agriculture Commissioner Jim Hightower told several thousand family farmers, "We're here to tell Monsanto and the other corporations: Get your modified seeds and your chemicals out of our food supply!"

Although the collapse of the conference has generated talk of the demise of the WTO, it's premature to draw up the death certificate. Negotiators will soon head to Geneva to talk again under far less scrutiny. But what has been accomplished is remarkable. Five years ago it was unimaginable that thousands would fill the streets and hundreds get arrested over trade and capital flows (although those have been hot issues in Europe and the developing world for some time). Protesters can take some of the credit for the last-minute implosion of the WTO talks; many dissident trade ministers, seeing the eroding support for the US agenda on Clinton's own streets, felt less compelled to comply with US unilateralism in the convention halls. (Other factors ranged from resentment over US antidumping laws to Clinton's call, quickly muted, to include labor rights in the agreement—which alienated many delegates from the Third World, where elites routinely exploit workers and ravage environments.)

The energy that erupted in Seattle will be put to the test in the months to come. Maybe it will dissipate. But maybe it heralds something new: an American political debate that's no longer between liberals and conservatives but between populists and corporatists. If what we saw in Seattle is what democracy looks like—well, it's looking pretty damn good.

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EDITORIALS

The Battle Beyond Seattle

A little broken glass in the streets of Seattle has transformed the World Trade Organization into a popular icon for the unregulated globalization that tramples human values on every continent, among rich and poor alike. The guys and gals in turtle suits, with a little help from overanxious cops, woke up America and maybe the world.

The WTO, I had assumed, was already a doomed institution. It lacks the legal authority to police the domain it grandiosely claims to govern. Nor are its founding sponsors going to allow genuine reform, since accepting the legitimacy of labor and environmental rights, social obligations and national sovereignty would destroy the WTO's usefulness for global business and finance. Given the dilemma, I do not expect this queer duck of pseudogovernance—a private club for deal-making among the most powerful interests, portrayed as a public institution searching for international "consensus"—to survive. Of course, it may take years of agitation and conflict before the global establishment accepts reality. Arrogance designed the WTO; arrogance will doubtless defend it. In the meantime, the WTO can serve as a splendid rallying point for popular resistance.

The organization was created in 1995 based on a colossal error in judgment: Multinational firms and financiers, joined by political elites in wealthy nations, failed to grasp that once the cold war was over, people would be able to look more directly upon the pathologies and instabilities of the globalizing economy. For four decades, critics and victims were silenced by the cold war's imperatives. Now the veil has fallen away, and a burgeoning worldwide movement is finding its voice.

Bill Clinton bet his presidency on the same misjudgment. He formed an obsequious alliance with US multinationals and Wall Street finance to secure his own power, while his famous charm was used to deflect the disappointed constituencies he betrayed. Those groups—organized labor, environmentalists, the religious faithful, free-spirited humanists—called his bet in Seattle, and this time manipulation failed him. When John Sweeney of the AFL-CIO refused to accept one more fig-leaf gesture of the President's good intentions, Clinton dared not move forward with another business-friendly sellout.

Clinton and the trade lawyers in his Administration may have been misled by believing their own simple-minded rhetoric on free trade—"more trade good, no trade bad," the mantra they repeat in response to every grievance. It is a non sequitur that dodges the fundamental issues. Without the cold war, it no longer persuades a majority of Americans. The mantra also misrepresents the essential nature of the global system. Yes, trade liberalization reduces formal barriers like tariffs, but the operating reality of the global system is a complex, informal arena of irregular political bargaining among producers and suppliers, investors and governments—deal-making across national borders that shapes every sector of commerce.

Does Boeing want to sell more airplanes to China? Then Boeing must negotiate terms for market access. China demands a share of the production, jobs and advanced technology. Boeing meets the demands; China buys more planes. All multinational giants, from AT&T and Motorola to Volvo and Toyota, routinely do similar sorts of deals. This is not free trade; it's a crude system managed by political bartering among major interests. The GATT agreements, dating from the first one in the forties, simply provide a set of closely argued rules of the road for deal-making. An agreement typically starts with a few broad principles about equal treatment for all trading partners, but what fills up the text is the crazy quilt of lawyerly exceptions—the fine print that spells out how certain principles can be ignored in certain cases, how some forbidden practices are allowed by mutual agreement among the self-interested companies and governments.

This is not law, and the players are bound to cheat (and not just the poorer nations). So the WTO was created as an enforcement officer. Now the barter process has been stretched to include national laws and standards, even national values, on any matter that disturbs someone's trading interests. If a nation passes legislation—to save dolphins or French farmers—that intrudes on the sacred freedom of commerce, the offending nation will be ordered to pay the aggrieved parties. That money-driven enforcement process is a ludicrous approach to global law-making and, without popular consent, impossible to achieve. The WTO aspires, in effect, to create a bill of rights for capital, crafted one case at a time by the corporate lawyers filing their confidential pleadings in Geneva. It is not hyperbole when critics say the system defends property rights but dismisses human rights and common social concerns as irrelevant to trade.

In Seattle developing countries were blamed for the rejection of labor rights and environmental protections, but the media neglected to mention that the AFL-CIO collected endorsements for its demands from more than 100 labor federations around the world, including struggling independent union movements in the poorest places, where labor is often brutally suppressed by force. They know they're on a hopeless treadmill without international protection, because their wages and working conditions will be undercut by the next poor country below them on the food chain, bidding for industrial jobs by sacrificing workers.

The media also ignored the plain truth that India, Brazil and Pakistan could not prevail alone but were joined in opposition by the largest multinationals. Does Boeing support the idea of independent trade unions in China, where its workers are supervised and disciplined by CP cadres? Will Motorola, Intel and the other US semiconductor manufacturers inform the Malaysian government that they no longer oppose independent unions for the young women working in Malaysian factories? No, of course not. In China, Mexico and many other low-wage production platforms, factory wages are effectively set by the government itself, not by free-market competition or collective bargaining. The companies like it that way. So, of course, do those governments.

The campaign for authentic reform will be a long and uphill struggle, but it may already be time to open a new front. The next target for protest, I suggest, ought to be the major multinationals themselves, at least those that claim America as home base. If we are told that the WTO cannot consider such straightforward matters as child labor and humane working conditions, then the task of global reform must reside in the national legislatures,

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including Congress. America cannot tell other nations how to govern their domestic affairs, but it certainly can tell its own companies what's intolerable to US consumers and citizens. If Congress can prohibit overseas bribery by US corporations, it can prohibit abuses of humanity in their foreign factories, especially when the goods are produced for American consumers.

As national legislation is developed to hold our global firms accountable for their behavior, we will be told that this approach violates our agreement to accept the WTO's governance. That's true. We do not accept it. WILLIAM GREIDER

William Greider is The Nation*'s national affairs correspondent.*

Solidarity on the Farm

As the farm crisis confronts 40,000 Midwestern family farmers with the prospect of being forced off the land [see Dave Hage, "Bitter Harvest," October 11], no state faces a situation more dire than Minnesota. Although the problem is nothing new, this time it has spawned novel responses. Broad community-based coalitions are forming, and many young activists are becoming involved.

In Minnesota alone, where average net farm income has decreased 79 percent since 1997, 6,500 people may abandon farming by the end of the year. The issues are not just plummeting sales and crop prices but the nature of food production, the environmental impact of corporate-friendly farming and the dominating force of global conglomerates. Urban and suburban young people, environmental activists and consumers are recognizing that no single group has the strength to defeat forces this powerful.

In late August various political and farm organizations sponsored a Rural Crisis Accountability Day rally in Waconia that drew 2,000 people, including Andrea Kiepe, a 25-year-old activist. "When I have run into farmers, they have been desperate for my support," she said. The rally, which called on Congress to provide long-term solutions to the crisis, produced rare scenes, like an overalls-clad farmer standing side by side with a young, dreadlocked activist from the city.

One group largely responsible for the mobilization of younger people is the Clean Water Action Alliance of Minnesota. Emphasizing the confluence of environmental, farming, consumer and economic issues, CWA has sent young canvassers door to door in rural counties and large cities. "If we don't have small farmers on the land, we're not going to have a sustainable environment," said Marie Zellar, state director for CWA. And farmers have recognized the value of this support. "They know they're in danger of being forced out in a few years," Zellar said, "and they've found themselves becoming environmental advocates."

Dwight Ault, a 69-year-old family farmer from Austin, Minnesota, has been active in the fight to preserve sustainable farming for more than twenty-five years and shows a willingness to embrace support from wherever it comes. "Our bottom line is not necessarily making more and more money but taking care of the land and community development," Ault said. "The farmers who are savvy realize that [younger people] are our allies. The consumer and the urban people are often the ones who care."

Actions like those of CWA seem worlds apart from the kind of support glimpsed during the farm crisis of the eighties, when farmers gained little more than the charity of celebrities through the Farm Aid benefit concerts. "This time, it's much more of a communitywide effort," said Pete Takash, public affairs director for the Minnesota Farmers Union. If coalitions of farmers, environmentalists and younger activists can stay strong, he says, "we can preserve the kind of farming we want. We're not proposing going back to subsistence farming of the twenties, but we're saying, 'Hey, people have a place out here, not just profit.'"

Although the movement in Minnesota is still small, it points the way to larger triumphs. If nothing else, the concerned and committed in Minnesota—rural and urban, young and old—provide hope that responses to the heartland's crisis can reach from plains to cities, from Minnesota to other places in the Midwest, and that the plight of the small family farmer will not forever be a solitary one. JASON SOKOL

Jason Sokol is a Nation *intern.*

CALVIN TRILLIN

ON THE RELEASE OF JOHN MCCAIN'S PSYCHOLOGICAL RECORDS

The records show, as you have heard,
McCain is not a cuckoo bird.
Yes, he's OK. That's no surprise.
Now how about the other guys?

Bush's Tax Flim-Flam

"It's important for the Republican nominee...to hear the cries of people on the outskirts of poverty," said Texas Governor George W. Bush at the recent presidential debate in Arizona. The GOP, he added, "is oftentimes associated with the big and the rich; we need to be associated with the working people. And I've laid out a [tax] plan to do that." Bush is a candidate of mantras. There's "look at my record," "I'm ready to lead" and his flagship mantra, "I'm a compassionate conservative." To the litany he recently added another: "My tax cut helps the middle class and hard-working families." In the handout explaining the plan, Bush noted that his priority was "to increase access to the middle class for hard-working families." Read his lips: I'm not one of those for-the-rich Republicans.

But the numbers belie his professed compassion. An analysis conducted by Citizens for Tax Justice found that of the $1.7 trillion, ten-year tax cut, 61.6 percent of the benefits will go to the

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top 10 percent of tax filers (people who make $89,000 or more), and only 11 percent will reach those in the bottom 60 percent (earning less than $38,200). The Bush campaign disputes those numbers, but the figures would have to be inverted for Bush to come close to making good on his claim.

To dub this a tax cut for middle- and low-income Americans, Bush had to become a contortionist. His campaign material asserts that the cuts—which include reductions in all income tax brackets, the obliteration of the estate tax and a boost in the child tax credit—"are especially focused on low and moderate income families." The proof? "Roughly $3 out of every $6 returned to taxpayers would finance changes that help low income families." By that he means two provisions: the new 10 percent bracket and the doubling of the child tax credit. But read him carefully: The three bucks go to financing "changes" that apply to all taxpayers, not just low-income families. Under the Bush plan, the newly doubled $1,000 child tax credit will be phased out at $200,000 (a couple), not the current $110,000. And the 10 percent bracket—down from 15 percent—will cover the first $12,000 (for married couples) earned by all taxpayers, even billionaires. Thus, many of the gains from these two changes will accrue to the well-off. The three-out-of-six-dollars figure is a curveball stat designed to mislead.

There's more creative accounting going on. Bush asserts that the cost of his tax cut will be covered by federal surpluses separate from the Social Security surplus. But the non–Social Security surpluses exist only on paper; they are projected on the assumption that Congress and the White House will abide by draconian budget caps established in 1997. But few in Washington—including GOP Congressional committee chairmen—have been willing to live within those limits. In the most recent budget go-round, those caps were exceeded by about $30 billion, according to the Congressional Budget Office, wiping out the non–Social Security surplus and forcing the government to dip into the Social Security revenues for $17 billion. To guarantee that there is a surplus to finance his tax cut, Bush might well have to enforce severe spending slashes, and domestic program cuts usually disproportionately hit poor and low-income citizens. Moreover, Bush's tax plan, according to his own documents, would provide relief only to a taxpayer whose income is above 150 percent of the poverty level. The rest of the working poor, who may not pay income taxes but who do pay payroll taxes, get little help.

Meanwhile, the tax cut is loaded with provisions that assist only the wealthy. That's merely good constituent service. More than 90 percent of Bush's contributors are $200-plus donors, and these contributors tend to be people who make over $100,000 a year. Bush's tax plan would repeal the estate tax, which applies to only 1 to 2 percent of all estates. (Estates under $650,000 are currently untaxed; the floor will rise to $1 million by 2006.) Bush also would extend the corporation research tax credit, much fancied by the computer and pharmaceutical industries—donors of hundreds of thousands of dollars to his campaigns.

In essence, this is a typical GOP tax cut. The bulk of the rewards go to upper-income Americans, and the plan could force deficits or dramatic spending cuts. Yet Bush has draped the proposal with I-care-about-the-poor happy talk. It's a cunning move; he's giving us not compassion but illusion. DAVID CORN

In Fact...

THE CASE OF MONICA'S DRESS

Before Ken Starr resigned as independent counsel (a job he can't seem to give up, judging by the way he keeps lecturing the President), he said he was considering turning over to the National Archives the items Monica Lewinsky provided as evidence in return for her grant of immunity; for example, a hatpin, two brooches, a blanket, a marble bear figurine, a special edition of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and one semen-stained blue dress from the Gap. We asked Adam Lehner to check on the current status of these famous effects. He writes: When Ken Starr said he was thinking of turning over the stuff to the National Archives, various representatives of that repository exploded quietly with delight at the thought of their impending bonanza. There is a problem with this, though, which is that Ken Starr, and now his successor, Robert Ray, has no right to give those things to anybody except Monica Lewinsky. Normally, at the end of an investigation a person's items are returned. When contacted, Ed Page of the independent counsel's office cited the rules governing the handling of subpoenaed items—a category that would seem not to apply to Lewinsky, because she gave her things up under an immunity agreement. In any event, as Akhil Amar, Southmayd Professor of Law at Yale, points out, there is nothing in the agreement about Starr keeping everything forever to do whatever he likes with: "The independent counsel's office is not an artifact-collecting wing of the Smithsonian or the National Archives," Amar says. "There would be no reason for Lewinsky to think that when she gave him her things those things would end up in some museum." Lewinsky lawyer Plato Cacheris says, "She wants her things back, and we're confident that she'll get them." And why shouldn't she? A battle-stained dress can seem as worthy of sentimental attachment as any former boyfriend's boxer shorts or college sweatshirt—even if it does remind one of a big creep. More important, there is potentially a lot of money to be made. If Robert Ray were to give back the dress, Lewinsky could put it up for auction. Stephen Fishler of Metropolis Collectibles in Manhattan has estimated that the dress could go for as much as half a million dollars. And the money would come none too soon. Monica's legal bills are said to be enormous—$2 million, by one estimate—and it must be hard for someone with her particular kind of celebrity to get a regular job. (She has resorted to hawking rose-labeled purses on the Internet and earning $10,000 from weight-loss chain Jenny Craig for every pound of flesh she takes off.) And if the independent counsel decides to keep the dress and the other items? Then he will have to compensate her for them, just as the Zapruder family was compensated—to the tune of $16 million, in its case—for the donation of its historical film to the National Archives. "If someone holds a gun to your head and tells you to make a free gift of the contents of your wallet," says Amar, "we would not consider this transaction to be the giving of a gift. He's got to pay her."

HARD-HITTING ISSUE

According to contributor Monte Paulsen, *The Nation*'s WTO special issue was widely circulated in Seattle during the recent meeting. On Wednesday night, when a cop began roughing up one protester, others began thwacking the officer with—you guessed it—rolled-up copies of *The Nation*.

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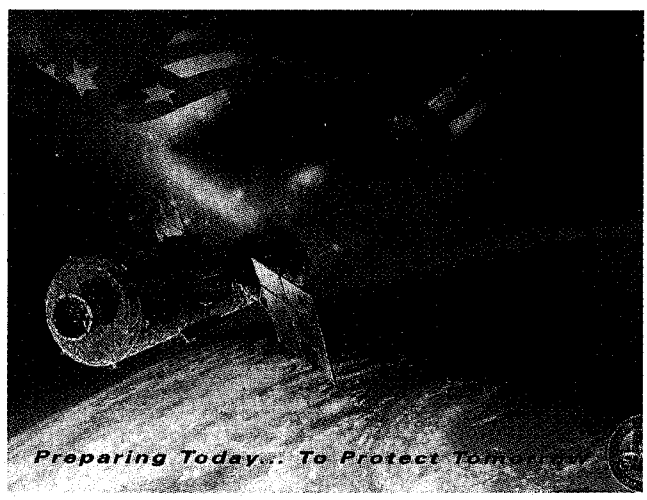
Waging War in Space

"Master of Space"—a motto of the United States Space Command, a joint Air Force, Army and Navy command set up by the Pentagon in 1985—says it all. Our military leaders seek to control outer space, and dominate the earth, by basing weapons in space. Corporate America is deeply involved.

"US Space Command—dominating the space dimension of military operations to protect US interests and investment. Integrating Space Forces into warfighting capabilities across the full spectrum of conflict," says the command's *Vision for 2020*, a report whose colorful cover depicts a laser weapon in space zapping targets on the Earth below—its goal in the next two decades. "Space is the ultimate high ground," says the Air Force Space Command.



In 1996 the Space Command's commander in chief, Gen. Joseph Ashy, put it bluntly. "It's politically sensitive, but it's going to happen.... we're going to fight *in* space. We're going to fight *from* space and we're going to fight *into* space.... That's why the US has development programs in directed energy and hit-to-kill mechanisms.

"We'll expand into these two missions—space control and space force application [military jargon for control of Earth from space]—because they will become increasingly important. We will engage terrestrial targets someday—ships, airplanes, land targets—from space. We will engage targets in space, from space."

An Air Force board report, *New World Vistas: Air and Space Power for the 21st Century*, says: "In the next two decades, new technologies will allow the fielding of space-based weapons of devastating effectiveness to be used to deliver energy and mass as force projection in tactical and strategic conflict.... These advances will enable lasers...to effect very many kills."

The projection of US power by means of deadly technology has other nations understandably upset. This past January in Geneva, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan urged the UN's annual Conference on Disarmament to "codify principles which can ensure that outer space remains weapons-free." At the March session of the conference, China's Ambassador for Disarmament Affairs Li Changhe called for an international law forbidding not only nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction in space—as does the 1967 Outer Space Treaty—but "any weapons" in space.

"Outer space is the common heritage of human beings," declared Wang Xiaoyu, First Secretary of China's mission to the UN. "It should be used entirely for peaceful purposes and for the economic, scientific and cultural development of all countries as well as the well-being of mankind. It must not be weaponized and become another arena of the arms race." In November 138 nations voted in the UN General Assembly to reaffirm the Outer Space Treaty and its provision that space "shall be for peaceful purposes." Only the United States and Israel abstained. Assistant secretary of the Air Force for Space Keith Hall says, "Space dominance, we have it, we like it and we're going to keep it."

And money flows for it. The budget for Ronald Reagan's "Star Wars," now known under the Clinton Administration as Ballistic Missile Defense, has held steady at about $4 billion a year. Extra billions are secret, or "in the black." This past March Congress approved an additional $6.6 billion through 2005.

Follow the money and you find corporate America. A Space Command report called *Long Range Plan*, issued last year, says that "the development and production process...involved...about 75 corporations" in space weapons projects. Also last year, a contract for a Space-Based Laser Readiness Demonstrator was signed. A poster for the project shows a laser firing a beam in space above the curve of the Earth's surface. An American flag floats in the heavens like an aurora borealis. A seal shows the "team" working on the project: TRW, Boeing, the Air Force, the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization.

As if these space-based lasers, hypervelocity guns and particle-beam weapons aren't nightmare enough, they'll likely be nuclear powered, according to *New World Vistas*. "Setting the emotional issues of nuclear power aside," says the report, "this technology offers...large amounts of power in space." It also offers the specter of a fleet of Chernobyls orbiting the Earth.

Please contact the Global Network Against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space (www.globenet.free-online.co.uk; 352-337-9274; globalnet@mindspring.com). The heavens belong to all of us. KARL GROSSMAN AND JUDITH LONG

Karl Grossman, journalism professor at SUNY/Old Westbury, is the author of The Wrong Stuff *(Common Courage) and* Nukes in Space *(EnviroVideo—800-ECO-TVGO). Judith Long is* The Nation*'s copy editor.*

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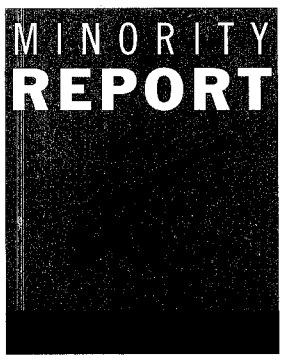
CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

Buckley's Cease-Fire Line



Oxford, Mississippi

So here we all are in the Tad Smith Coliseum (home of The Rebels) at "Ole Miss." Across the campus is the Thad Cochran Research Center. Soon to be inaugurated is the Trent Lott Leadership Studies program, which I gather will not be offered as a major. Both distinguished senators were cheerleaders here. Behind the coliseum is a graveyard—a mass grave, really—containing almost 700 bodies from the slaughter at Shiloh. Across the campus is the Lyceum, which took James Meredith so long to penetrate, with the aid of more than 10,000 armed soldiers. Facing it is a memorial to the university's "Grays" with a "Go Tell the Spartans" inscription in Greek on its plinth. (Only one of that 1861 class survived to see it dedicated.) Though locals are now inclined to point out John Grisham's old mansion on the edge of town, pride of place yet goes to William Faulkner's Rowan Oak plantation home. His riding boots are still where he left them on the floor. Sacked as the town's postmaster (a good job, he used to say, but it put you at the beck and call of any sonofabitch who wanted a 2-cent stamp), Faulkner retained a supercilious gentility that got him known round the place as "Count No 'Count," before it was understood that there was money lurking in the keys of his creaky Underwood typewriter.

We are here—Jack Kemp, Michael Kinsley, Robert Kuttner, myself and others—to recognize a master of the supercilious and the genteel. Tonight sees the recording of the very last of William Buckley's *Firing Line* shows. It's been thirty-three years—the lifespan of the alleged Jesus of Nazareth. Unlike that possible role model, Buckley has chosen to quit while people can still ask why (rather than simply, why not?). Though I can't say I always feel completely at home in Governor Fordice's state, the hospitality and courtesy exceed the billing, and in any case, Buckley deserves some kind of a send-off.

If you go on *Crossfire* or *Nightline* or any other of a dozen gab shows, you will infallibly leave the studio with that oppressive sense of what Diderot brilliantly termed *l'esprit d'escalier*. It is on the way down the staircase that one thinks of the point one really ought to have made. And this is because on these awful programs the whole studio is rigged against the dialectic. The clock is running too fast, there are too many guests, the control room is shouting into the earpiece of the presenter, the assumptions of the topic reflect the needs of the consensus and the pressures of the ratings.

People ask why you don't see Noam Chomsky on the tube. It's not just flat-out bias so much as the fact that his views are literally unutterable in the time and format available. I did my first *Firing Line* in 1983 and swiftly learned that if I left the studio cursing at what I hadn't said, it was my own fault. Chomsky once told me that during the war in Indochina, the best opportunity he had to give his views on the air was afforded by Buckley. (A repeat appearance was promised but did not materialize. Well, you can't have everything.)

A retrospective of old *Firing Line*s is shown as a warm-up for the crowd, and there we get to see the very young Jesse Jackson, the very furious William Kunstler, the very urbane J.K. Galbraith. None of them ever got such a chance to present their opinions on (let's say just for a laugh) *MacNeil/Lehrer*. Tonight it's two hours devoted to the dry-seeming but actually enthralling question of taxation and Internet commerce. Who else would risk such a thing? Buckley is more languid than usual, as perhaps befits the retiring honoree; it's difficult to believe that this is the same man who snarled so hatefully at Gore Vidal in Chicago in 1968—though mind you, that notorious lapse occurred on someone else's show, and there's no danger, no danger at all, that ABC would even risk such a confrontation today.

I thought I detected suspicious signs of mellowing in Buckley when I met him for a debate, last summer, at the Hoover Institution in Stanford. (The show was *Uncommon Knowledge*, chaired by Peter Robinson, and one hopes that this will now succeed *Firing Line* on public television.) The subject was 1968 in retrospect. I was first asked my views on the Vietnam War and invited to say if I would alter them in hindsight. I said my only regret, amounting to shame, was that I hadn't done more to oppose it. Buckley, asked the identical question, said that he now wished the United States had never engaged itself in Vietnam at all. The chairman, looking slightly discomposed, said, Well, you also opposed the Civil Rights Act in those days, didn't you, but you wouldn't say that today, would you? Oh yes, replied Buckley, for whom the phrase "no whit abashed" might have been invented, in point of actual fact he would, too. As our chairman's face filled with alarm, Buckley added that while he might not now oppose the act in the same way, he still felt on balance that it had brought more trouble than it was worth. Whew, I thought. For a moment there I feared we had a love-fest on our hands.

The cover of the *New York Times Magazine* for November 28 bannered an essay of extreme tendentiousness by Jacob Weisberg, thoughtlessly titled "The Rehabilitation of Joe McCarthy." Liberals of all stripes lined up to say that perhaps the Senator from Wisconsin had been right after all, and Ronald Radosh was given yet another chance to state that the Spanish Civil War was won by the right side. The only anti-McCarthy revisionist quoted was…William Buckley. As Weisberg put it in a clumsy sentence, he "now also endorses the contradictory stance of Whittaker Chambers, who thought McCarthy was too indiscriminate to do the cause of anti-Communism any good and thus deserving of repudiation." Repudiation, no less! And this from Joe McCarthy's oldest and fiercest partisan. I don't know whether Buckley has also modified his once-friendly view of fascism in Spain, but leave it to Radosh to pick up the flag that's too dirty for the right to carry anymore and fawn on Generalissimo Franco too. This entitles me to be sorry that there's no more *Firing Line* on which I could tell him what a creep I think he is. ■

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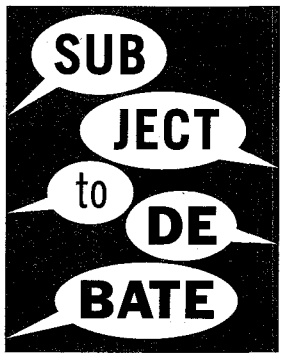
KATHA POLLITT

Affirmative Action for Men?



Women today constitute 54 percent of college students 24 and younger, and 56 percent of college students overall. Some people have a problem with that. At a conference held in November at Goucher College titled "Fewer Men on Campus," an array of education experts put forth a variety of gloomy explanations: a lack of smart role models for boys in popular culture; the prevalence of female teachers in elementary grades; a lack of attention to boys' developmental needs. Tom Mortenson, the education analyst who is the torchbearer for the issue, blamed single-parent families and the increasing "disengagement" of men from family, work and civic life. Others mentioned boys' greater physicality, their impatience with rules and instructions, social taboos on male expressivity.

Some of these explanations are clearly wrong—elementary school teaching has been in the hands of women for more than a century, but female undergrads started consistently outnumbering males only in the late eighties. Still, the Goucher conference represented the reasonable end of an often acrimonious conversation. On a *Chronicle of Higher Education* Web discussion board, a male professor claimed campus feminists have driven men to avoid college; another said men are discouraged by having to deal with more and more female registrars and administrators.

Are "fewer men" going to college, though—or more women? "More of everybody is going to college, actually," Jacqueline King of the American Council on Education (ACE) told me. A far higher percentage of kids are graduating from high school than in, say, 1960, when 54 percent of boys went directly to college and 38 percent of girls—a situation that aroused no worryfests, by the way. Of today's larger high school grad population, a higher percentage of boys (64 percent) is going on to college—but the percentage of girls is even higher (70 percent). Why? It's possible, of course, that girls are just smarter and, with the toppling of formal barriers to education, can finally reap the rewards of their brainpower. More likely, though, it's economics that drives women to college.

For all we hear about the decline of high-paid blue-collar jobs, women with a college degree average barely more than men with a high school diploma—$35,400 versus $31,200. (Women with only a high school diploma average $22,000.) Women are mostly shut out of the high-tech industries in which Bill Gates, a college dropout, made himself the world's richest man. A boy can get a certificate from Microsoft or Intel and earn a decent living. As former Georgia Governor Zell Miller said, "Who in his right mind would want to go into debt for the privilege of reading *Beowulf* when he can make $30,000 a year in air-conditioner maintenance straight out of high school?" *Beowulf* doesn't look so bad when the alternative is waitressing or cleaning bedpans in a nursing home. If women could earn as much as men without a college degree, lots of them would probably give it a pass too.

As the above suggests, class is often a buried issue when we talk about gender—and so is race. According to ACE, among non-Hispanic white students 24 and younger, it's a nearly even split between men (49 percent) and women (51 percent) enrolled in college. It's among nonwhites that the gap shows up. Among black college students, only 37 percent are male as against 63 percent who are female. Among Hispanics, 45 percent are male and 55 percent are female. That minority girls, despite poverty, inferior schools and all the other strikes against them, are more likely to make it to college than their brothers is a tribute to their determination. But mostly their achievement is presented as yet another problem: They will have to marry less-educated men—or remain single.

Nobody worried about unequal education levels in marriage when it was the man who typically had the BA. No college over the many long decades of greater male enrollment would have considered lowering its standards to admit more women to improve the dating scene or engineer more intellectual compatibility in marriage. Indeed, until the seventies colleges routinely and openly discriminated in favor of men, whether by formally limiting the number of female students, admitting women to smaller single-sex colleges affiliated with larger all-male institutions (Harvard-Radcliffe, Columbia-Barnard, Rutgers-Douglass) or, most commonly, demanding higher qualifications of female applicants. Nowadays that kind of preference would be illegal. Yet that colleges today admit less-qualified men over more-qualified women is higher education's dirty little secret. "I'm sure it happens," political scientist Andrew Hacker told me, and every expert I talked with agreed, including Tom Mortenson, who said the practice outraged him. In one of the few cases that made the papers, the University of Georgia was forced to abandon its practice of giving male applicants extra points after a female applicant sued for being denied admittance.

Are some boys disadvantaged in education today—maybe not more than girls, as Mortenson argues, but in different ways? In poor neighborhoods, where special education functions as a dumping ground for kids with disciplinary problems, the vast majority of kids in special ed are boys. More broadly, minority boys are targeted by police, and often end up in jail instead of school. It's true, too, that boys, like girls, are victims of a cult of masculinity. A society that makes a hero of Stone Cold Steve Austin shouldn't be too surprised if boys scorn intellectual pursuits.

Opponents of affirmative action haven't had much to say about admissions policies that give boys a break. Maybe they're embarrassed. After all, one reason girls do better is that they work harder. But if it's acceptable to admit less-qualified white, middle-class boys to make for a happier campus social scene, or increase the number of potential husbands, why can't a similar rationale be used to dip further into the applicant pool of minorities? A racially and ethnically integrated campus serves important social functions too—as students from heavily white campuses will discover when they move out into the big world.

Right now the moral on campus seems to be: If white men can't jump, lower the basket. ■

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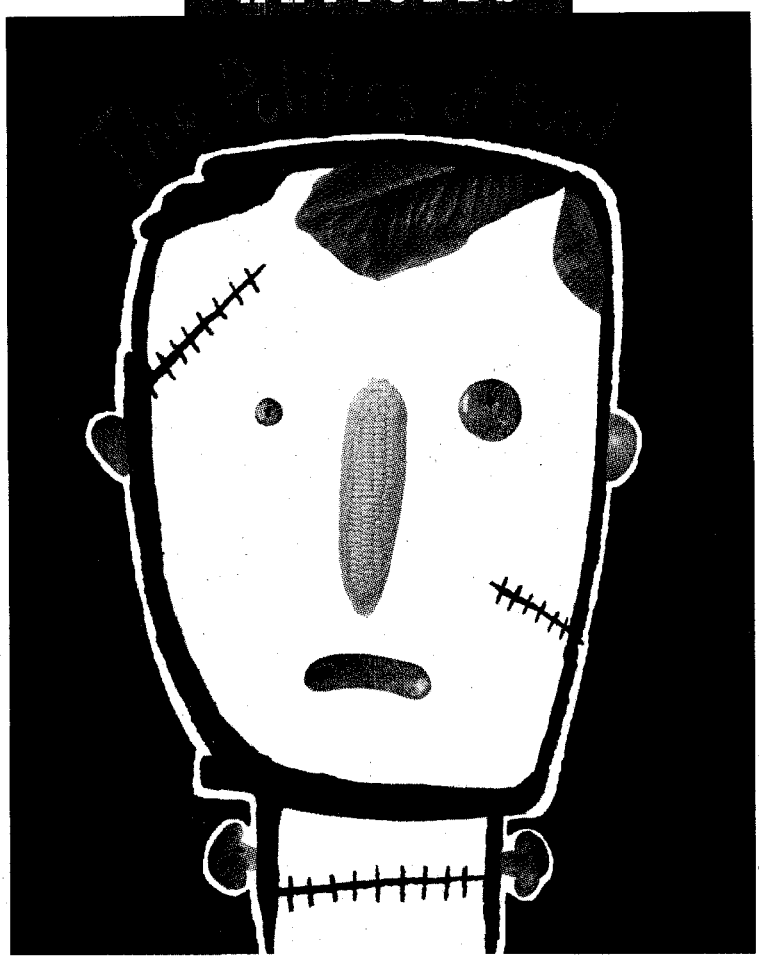
ARTICLES



AS BIOTECH 'FRANKENFOODS' ARE STUFFED DOWN THEIR THROATS, CONSUMERS REBEL.

By Maria Margaronis

Case sawed shakily at his steak, reducing it to uneaten bite-sized fragments, which he pushed around in the rich sauce.... "Jesus," Molly said, her own plate empty, "gimme that. You know what this costs?" She took his plate. "They gotta raise a whole animal for years and then they kill it. This isn't vat stuff." —*William Gibson,* Neuromancer

London

A year ago, Monsanto chairman Robert Shapiro had the future in his pocket. His vast "life sciences" corporation was at the cutting edge of the new agricultural revolution, genetic modification; the spread of GM seeds throughout the United States, he told his shareholders, was the most "successful launch of any technology ever, including the plow." The little matter of European distaste for the new crops would, he felt sure, be resolved by the right kind of PR and some careful scientific reassurance. As Ann Foster, the company's personable British flack, patiently explained to anti-GM campaigners here, "people will have Roundup Ready soya, whether they like it or not."

So far, things have not gone according to plan. The European Union has a de facto moratorium on the commercial growing of GM crops, pending further discussion (the only exception is the Swiss company Novartis's Bt corn, currently being grown in Spain). Austria, Luxembourg, Italy and Greece have total or partial bans on the technology. Even the Blair government, in love with the sleek promises of high-tech business and keen to keep Clinton sweet, has bowed to public pressure and put off the commercial planting of GM seeds in Britain for at least three years. (Environment Minister Michael Meacher, whose views on the subject are carefully tracked by the CIA, has reportedly said in private that GM crops will never be grown commercially here.) Shoppers have rejected GM food in droves, prompting a breathless race among the supermarket chains to go GM-free. As a report by the British government's Science and Technology Committee put it, "At the current rate at which food manufacturers are withdrawing GM ingredients...from their products, there will be no market for GM food in this country."

US soy exports to Europe are down from $2.1 billion in 1996 to $1.1 billion in 1999, and anxiety about GM crops (or genetically engineered crops, as they're generally known in the United States) is blowing across the prairies. Last spring and summer a series of reports by the influential Deutsche Bank urged investors to pull out of agricultural biotechnology altogether: "The term GMO [genetically modified organism] has become a liability. We predict that GMOs, once perceived as the driver of the bull case for this sector, will now be perceived as a pariah." In October a chastened Shapiro apologized to Greenpeace for his "enthusiasm," which, he acknowledged, could be read as "condescension or indeed arrogance." Monsanto's stock has gone seriously pear-shaped, and the board has reportedly considered a company breakup.

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What happened? How did a loose assemblage of European environmental activists, development charities, food retailers and supermarket shoppers stop a huge multinational industry, temporarily at least, in its tracks?

The first protests against genetic modification took place in America in the late seventies, when activists from a group called Science for the People destroyed frost-resistant strawberries and delayed the construction of Princeton's molecular-biology building. Then they fizzled out. Americans, by and large, trust the FDA to keep the levels of toxicity in their daily bread down to a psychologically manageable level and don't worry too much about the source of the goodies that fill their horn of plenty. The great grain factories of the Midwest work their magic far from the places most people visit to enjoy nature. In much of Europe, though, nature and agriculture go hand in glove, occupying the same physical and social space. Europe's layered patchwork of farming and culinary landscapes has taken shape over 2,500 years, altered by small and large migrations, the conquest and loss of colonies, wars and revolutions. Europeans feel strongly about what they eat: Food is a matter of identity as well as economy, culture as well as nurture.

The arrogance with which the American biotech firms approached the European food industry is the stuff of legend.

The most dramatic changes in European farming in this century came about partly as a result of the experience of famine during World War II: The much-reviled Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the European Union has its origins in the determination that Europe should never again see mass starvation. By protecting and supporting their farmers against the vagaries of trade while simultaneously investing in intensive agriculture (a contradiction in terms, you might say, since roughly 80 percent of Europe's farm subsidies go to 20 percent of its farmers), European governments hoped to insure long-term food security for their people. But, as they usually do, the contradictions eventually came home to roost.

"The fourth agricultural revolution," says Tim Lang, professor of food policy at Thames Valley University and one of the new food movement's intellectual lights, "is beginning just as the third one—agrochemicals and intensive farming—is unraveling." The unraveling has made itself felt both in the economic crisis that affects many of Europe's farmers and in a series of food-safety scandals caused by deregulation and overintensive production. The outbreak of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in Britain's cattle in the eighties and its appearance in humans as the fatal new-variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in the nineties was the most powerful catalyst for the public's loss of faith in governments and food producers. In one terrifying package, BSE tied together the new "economical" farming practices (in this case the feeding of ground-up cow carcasses to cattle), the easing of health and safety standards, and government's willingness to lie for the food industry even at the cost of human lives.

So far, new-variant CJD has killed forty-three people in Britain; the chief medical officer recently warned that millions may still contract it from beef they ate fifteen years ago. By some estimates, the whole affair has cost about $6.5 billion, much of it put up by the European Union. Elsewhere in Europe, similar stories break with depressing regularity. Last summer, for instance, a cover-up of dioxin contamination in animal feed brought down the Belgian government and part of the Dutch Cabinet and had worried gourmets across the continent throwing out chickens, eggs and Belgian chocolate to the tune of $800 million. (The Coca-Cola crisis that followed, in which 30 million cans and bottles of the elixir of life were poured down the drain after a number of people reportedly fell ill, turned out to be a genuine case of mass hysteria.) The anxiety is only partly contained by sideshows like the Anglo-French beef war, in which the British agriculture minister decided to boycott French food in retaliation for France's refusal to lift its ban on British beef with the rest of the European Union—simultaneously publicizing an EU report that found sewage sludge processed into French animal feed. The happy tabloid trumpeting that ensued momentarily restored the beef of Old England to its rightful place as a bulwark against the filthy Frogs, allowing the *Daily Mail* to boost its circulation with pictures of cows in berets and toilet-paper necklaces amid cries of "Just say *Non*!"

The biotech companies danced into this minefield with all the grace of an elephant in jackboots.

Ten years ago, agricultural biotechnology was debated only by what Labor MP Joan Ruddock (former leader of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) calls "men in white coats and men in gray suits," with environmental NGOs like Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth reporting on their activities but mounting no large-scale protests. In 1990 the first GM additive approved for use in British food, a GM baker's yeast, was swallowed without qualms; so was the GM tomato paste sold by Sainsbury's supermarket in 1996, at a lower price than its conventional equivalent. The trouble started that same year when the American Soybean Association, Monsanto and the US trade associations told British food retailers that they could not—would not—segregate American GM soybeans from the conventional kind, undermining the golden rule of consumer-friendly capitalism: Let them have choice. Around the same time, media and public awareness of the issue reached critical mass, and the supermarkets started getting worried letters from their customers asking them not to use GM ingredients.

The arrogance with which the American biotech firms approached the European food industry is the stuff of legend. Bill Wadsworth, technical manager of the frozen-food chain Iceland, recalls a meeting in September 1997 at which a biotech executive actually said, "You are a backward European who doesn't like change. You should just accept this is right for your customers." A few weeks later Wadsworth was on a plane to Brazil, where he found a grower and processor of non-GM soybeans and began to set up a vertically integrated supply chain for Iceland's processed foods. Iceland began to raise the issue's profile with its customers, pointing out that while Iceland's foods were GM free, those of the other supermarkets were contaminated. Before long every super-

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Five Years Ago Discussing Reform of Drug Policy Was Taboo. Now Ending the Drug War Is Popular!

by Kevin B. Zeese

KEVIN B. ZEESE

Over the past two years voters in seven states and the District of Columbia passed initiatives favoring medical marijuana or decriminalization of marijuana generally and treating drug offenses as a health issue rather than a law enforcement issue. Recently, a wide array of groups, including the NAACP, Volunteers of America, YWCA, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the United Methodist Church and the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, have called for a new approach to drug control.

There are at least three good reasons for revaluation of our current approaches:

Does Not Protect American Youth

Last year almost 10 percent of America's children between the ages of 12 and 17 used illegal drugs. That's nearly twice the 1992 percentage. Before graduating from high school, half will try an illegal drug.

Throughout the last two decades approximately 90 percent of high school students have said illegal drugs are easy for them to get-easier than beer.

Advocates for the current policy claim drug use has decreased since 1978. These claims are highly doubtful. 1) These figures come from a voluntary survey conducted by the federal government. Do we think people will be as honest about their drug use in the repressive 90s as they would have been in the more permissive 70s? 2) Certain key populations, among them prisoners, are not included in the survey. 3) Even according to this survey, last year, nearly 14 million Americans used illegal drugs. That's an increase of over 1.5 million drug users since the beginning of the Clinton Administration. 4) The health and social problems associated with drugs have worsened since 1978-overdose deaths and mentions of drugs in hospital emergency rooms are at record highs, while the spread of disease such as AIDS and hepatitis-C is rampant. These serious health problems are largely the result of prohibition which makes it impossible to know the purity of illegal drugs, discourages people from seeking prompt medical treatment for fear of incarceration, and often prohibits the sale of sterile syringes thereby spreading disease.

Americans recognize the drug war is not working: gangs and cartels are getting richer, adolescents have easy access to drugs, overdose deaths are at record highs. We are spending too much on a policy that doesn't work.

High Costs Without Results

At the Federal level the drug control budget has increased from $9 billion to $18 billion in less than a decade. Since Reagan-era nearly $200 billion has been spent on the drug war by the federal government. Nationally we spend approximately $50 billion annually on drug control.

Drugs are more potent and less expensive despite record arrests and incarceration of drug offenders. Since 1991, the price of pure heroin has dropped from over $3,000 per gram to $1,000 per gram, cocaine prices have dropped from $275 per gram to $94 per gram.

The economics of drug prohibition are undermining the economies and democratic institutions in foreign countries. The drug market is a $400 billion per year industry, equaling 8% of the world's trade according to the United Nations. The US Office of National Drug Control Policy estimates that $57 billion is spent annually on drugs in the US alone. Drug profits fuel insurgency movements, corrupt public officials and undermine the world's economy because prohibition turns plants into products more valuable than gold.

Cruel and Discriminatory Practices

Arrest and incarceration rates are at record highs. Over 1.5 million people are arrested each year for drug offenses, two-thirds for mere possession according to the FBI. Nationally, 1.8 million Americans are behind bars; 400,000 are incarcerated for drug offenses.

Only 11% of the nation's drug users are black; however, blacks constitute almost 37% of those arrested for drug violations, over 42% of those in federal prisons for drug violations, and almost 60% of those in state prisons for drug felonies.

What Can We Do?

We can be more effective if we are pragmatic, base our policy choices on the facts and are not afraid to face-up to the failure of current policy. Citizens need to get informed, get active and help end a very expensive and destructive policy. Future columns will discuss alternatives to the drug war. To learn more now, please visit www.csdp.org for alternative approaches, accurate information and connections to reform-minded organizations. And let us know how you or your organization can help spread the reform message.

Common Sense for Drug Policy, Kevin B. Zeese, President
703-354-9050, 703-354-5695, info@csdp.org, http://www.csdp.org.

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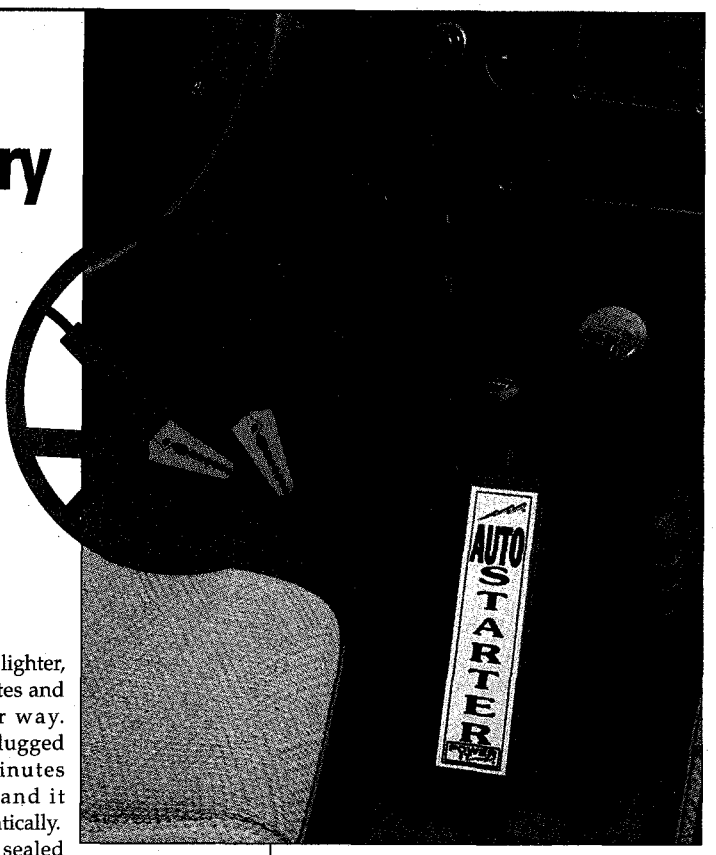
TECHNOLOGY UPDATE

Bring a drained battery back to life without opening your hood

The remarkable Auto Starter® eliminates the need for dangerous jumper cables and can provide independent power for a variety of uses.



by Chris Murdock

Imagine this...after a long flight home, you arrive at the airport parking lot, get in your car and turn the key and nothing happens. Guess what? Your car battery's drained. It's cold, dark and you're alone. Do you flag down a stranger and hope he has jumper cables? Do you walk back to the airport, phone a tow truck and wait? No...you simply reach into your glove box and take out your Auto Starter®. You plug it into your car's cigarette lighter and, in a matter of minutes, you're on your way.

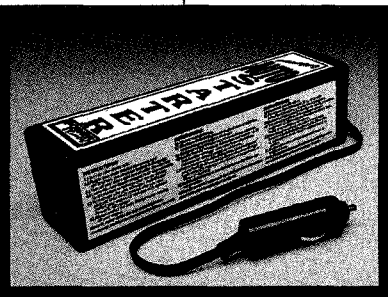
A good start. These days, cars have complex electrical systems which support many accessories. Many of these features operate even if your car isn't running, which increases the risk that someday you'll find your car's battery drained. Before Auto Starter, you either had to call a tow truck or try to get a jump from another vehicle. Tow trucks are slow to arrive and very expensive. Jumper cables, even heavy-duty ones, are dangerous and involve getting under the hood. Plus, there has to be another car around to provide the jump. Battery acid can burn your skin and ruin your clothes. If the cables are not connected correctly they can damage your car's expensive electrical system or, even worse, cause an explosion. With Auto Starter, you don't need a jump—you don't even have to open the hood. You simply plug the unit into the cigarette lighter, wait a few minutes and you're on your way. Leave the unit plugged in for 30-120 minutes while driving and it recharges automatically.

The five-amp sealed alkaline battery operates under extreme temperatures, from sub-zero to 120 degrees. It is less than eight inches long, so it stores easily in your glove box. Once it's charged, Auto Starter will retain the power to start your car for five years. It is the easiest, most convenient protection you can own.

Portable power. Auto Starter has many other uses. It's an independent 12V DC power supply that can operate TVs, radios, cellular phones and laptops. Almost any appliance that runs off of an adapter can operate independently with Auto Starter, so it's perfect for picnics, camping, boating and more.

Auto Starter also makes it easier to work on your car. Plug it in before you change the car battery, and you won't have to reprogram your car's clock, radio or alarm system. You wouldn't think of driving around without a spare tire—why not have a spare battery and alternator that fits right in your glove box?

Try it risk-free. Considering the cost of a tow, Auto Starter will pay for itself the first time you have a problem. This remarkable product is backed by a one-year manufacturer's limited warranty and Comtrad's exclusive risk-free home trial. If you are not fully satisfied for any reason, return it within 30 days for a full refund, "No Questions Asked."



The Auto Starter eliminates the need for another car to give you a jump, and gives you a portable 12-volt DC power supply!

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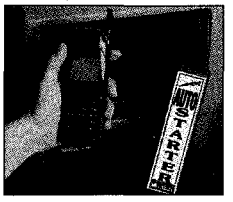
- *No opening the hood*
- *No jumper cables*
- *No tow trucks*
- *No flagging down strangers*
- *Portable power...anywhere*



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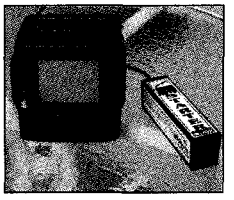

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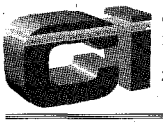

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market chain in the country was inundated with mail and phone calls about GM food and had begun to follow suit. In June 1998 a poll showed that 95 percent of British shoppers thought that all food containing GM ingredients should be labeled.

Meanwhile, the field testing of GM crops in Britain by Monsanto, AgrEvo, Novartis and other companies gave a dramatic focus to the environmental arguments against genetic modification. Media-savvy eco-activists in decontamination suits or grim reaper outfits began to pull up trial plantings and leaflet supermarkets; by the summer of 1998, hardly a week went by without reports of some new, inventive, nonviolent protest. English Nature, the government's own environmental watchdog, and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds both added their authoritative voices to calls for a moratorium on planting, citing the unpredictable and uncontainable dangers of releasing the new organisms into the ecosystem. Gene transfers could produce herbicide-resistant "superweeds"; crops genetically engineered to be toxic to insects might well affect the whole food chain, further damaging the biodiversity of a landscape already impoverished by intensive farming. In a country where the membership of environmental and conservation groups outstrips the membership of political parties by four to one, the disappearance of cornflowers and skylarks from fields and hedgerows is a political issue. Prince Charles's entry into the fray on the side of the green campaigners did much to enhance the post-Diana credibility of a man who not so long ago was widely ridiculed for talking to his plants.

'Genetically modified maize is...the symbol of a system of agriculture and a type of society that I refuse to accept.' —farmer José Bové

By the time Monsanto launched its too-clever-by-half ad campaign to sell biotechnology to the British public in the summer of 1998, the bonfire had been prepared. The united front of environmentalists, shoppers and food retailers, animated in part by fury at the hubris of multinationals' trying to pull the wool over their eyes, was joined by an army of development NGOs outraged by Monsanto's efforts to corner Third World seed markets with a technology that could destroy farmers' livelihoods while pretending to "feed the world." The spark that lit the flames was the broadcast that August of a television documentary about the work of Dr. Arpad Pusztai, a researcher at a government-funded institute who claimed that feeding GM potatoes to laboratory rats had slowed their growth and damaged their immune systems. Dr. Pusztai rapidly lost his job amid assertions that his work was flawed and incomplete, but the whole affair catapulted GMOs into the tabloid firmament. With its usual brash enthusiasm *The Express* launched a populist crusade against "Frankenfoods," and pretty soon not a man, woman or child in Britain was left in the dark. The GM controversy even made *The Archers*, BBC radio's venerable daily soap about an English farming family: To the relief of fans everywhere, young Tommy Archer was recently found not guilty of criminal damage after destroying a test crop of GM oilseed rape in one of his uncle's fields.

Downing Street has remained largely unmoved by all this protest, allowing Tory leader William Hague (who has himself been caricatured as a genetically modified vegetable) to make political hay out of Labor's urban unconcern for the environment and dazzled obeisance to the biotech firms. To Tony Blair, probusiness to his toenails, the GM revolution is part of the white heat of new technology that will carry the British economy through the next century. In the words of the government's Chief Scientific Adviser, Sir Robert May, "We have played a hugely disproportionate part in creating the underlying science: are we going to lose it like we lost things in the past?" Dolly the sheep, after all, was cloned here.

If we do "lose it" in the long run, it will be in part because of the government's serious misreading of the public mood. Had they proceeded from the start in an open and careful manner, acknowledging all the unanswered questions about genetic modification and treating the population as intelligent citizens instead of superstitious children, the eventual outcome might have been different. But even if—in some parallel universe—that had been New Labor's way, the biotech firms and the American growers in their thrall would never have allowed such caution. Blair may be predisposed to favor all kinds of high-tech business; he is also, as the environmentalist and writer George Monbiot puts it, "having his balls bust by Clinton."

For the United States, Britain is the gateway to Europe—and Europe is, if anything, even less enamored of biotechnology, despite the efforts of homegrown firms like Novartis and Zeneca. In Britain, Germany and elsewhere, resistance to GMOs has been led by green activists and consumers. In France, it has also involved the Confédération Paysanne, the country's second-largest farmers' union and political home of José Bové, famous for taking apart a new "McDo" in Millau to protest American food imperialism. Last year Bové was one of 120 farmers who destroyed silos-full of Bt corn—a GM variety that has been shown to affect lacewings, bees, ladybugs and monarch butterflies—then being grown in France. At his trial Bové made a passionate speech explaining his actions: "When were farmers and consumers asked what they think about this? Never. The decisions have been taken at the level of the World Trade Organization, and state machinery complies with the law of market forces.... Genetically modified maize is...the symbol of a system of agriculture and a type of society that I refuse to accept. Genetically modified maize is purely the product of technology, where the means become the end. Political choices are swept aside by the power of money."

Since then France has reversed its decision to grow the corn, for environmental and health-related reasons, and—after a timely intervention by Greenpeace and activist Jeremy Rifkin with the prime minister's advisers—has argued for an EU moratorium on further approvals of GM crops. In spite of stubborn British opposition, the moratorium is effectively if not officially in place: France, Italy, Denmark, Greece and Luxembourg have declared that they will block the issue of any new licenses until new regulations have been agreed. In addition, all foods sold in Europe that contain a significant percentage of GM ingredients now have to be labeled—a decision that immediately rebounded on US agribusiness, pushing giant grain traders like Cargill and Archer Daniels Midland to segregate their silos.

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In the war over the fourth agricultural revolution, the first round seems to have gone to the citizens. But this is only the beginning. The global food economy is regulated by the awkwardly interlocking gears of bodies like the EU and the WTO, themselves dominated by transnational corporations with budgets larger than those of many small countries. The patterns of competing interests and overlapping jurisdictions are dizzying. The Anglo-French beef war was partly a tempest in a teapot over market share, partly a struggle to determine whether the European Union or France's own freshly minted food-safety authority gets to vet what French people eat. The Clinton Administration has used the WTO to declare Europe's exclusion of American hormone-fed beef illegal (allowing the United States to levy $117 million in sanctions), and unless the great *salon des refusés* that gathered in Seattle wins some significant victories, it will almost certainly do the same with Europe's attempts to restrict GMOs. The loyal Blair government has already challenged Europe's de facto moratorium as a violation of WTO trade rules.

'Your people have rejected GM food. Where will it go? It won't go into the sea. It will go to countries like ours.' —farmer Vivek Cariappa

Like all victories, however partial, this one offers valuable pointers for the future. The opposition to GMOs in Europe has been informed and led by environmental organizations like Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth—part of the tidal wave of campaigning groups that filled the vacuum left by government in the neoliberal eighties. But the foot soldiers who really blocked the biotech firms' confident advance are the women and men who refused to buy their products—consumers, or citizens of global capitalism, voting in the only way they can. In the European movement against GM food, Ralph Nader's old strategy of organizing consumers at the point of consumption has found its best vindication yet.

Consumer politics, though, has its limitations. Transnational corporations are many-headed hydras, with the capacity to sprout new body parts in the blink of an eye. Once it had seen the writing on the wall, Monsanto immediately set about regrouping; at a series of closed meetings with environmental organizations earlier this year, it offered to use its gene databases to help farmers create new varieties of crops through traditional crossbreeding methods. Not surprisingly, Monsanto has also tried to push forward into countries where it believes people have more pressing worries than the possible risks of eating GMOs. In Georgia, for example, it held illegal trials of GM potatoes for two years before being exposed by Greenpeace and Elkana, a Georgian organic-farming group.

The challenge facing the great Internet-linked coalition of activists that makes up the new food movement is to keep on thinking globally while acting locally. In Europe, the GM debate has brought people's concern about the safety of what they eat to critical mass: British shoppers' demand for organic food has increased by 40 percent in the last year, as evidenced by the advance of pricey, rustically packaged organic produce—70 percent of it imported—along the shelves of Sainsbury's and Safeway. Farmers are slower to catch up, although some are trying. The government's program for organic conversion had exhausted its budget for 1999–2000 by March of this year, in spite of a $17 million top-up; Labor MP Ruddock has introduced a bill to increase the amount of land under organic cultivation over the next ten years. The Iceland chain, ever at the cutting edge, has begun a drive to provide affordable organic food by buying ingredients from places where conditions allow intensive cultivation with a minimum of chemical assistance—for instance, wheat from western Canada. Bill Wadsworth's strategy for the future is based on extending the principle of vertically integrated supply—"Grow me my soybeans that will go into my beefburger." But what will this mean for producers in poorer countries? Are we looking at a new United Fruit scenario, in which tropical islands grow wall-to-wall organic pineapples for Northern supermarkets while their people eat genetically engineered mush peddled by Monsanto's subsidiaries?

In November nine Indian farmers visited Britain, sponsored by Iceland and an international exchange group called Farmers' Link. Crammed into a small meeting room in Westminster, they told Ruddock about their intense frustration at being shut out of the WTO discussions that will determine their future. In India, where 75 percent of the population is directly involved in agriculture, trade liberalization has had a devastating effect: Importing cheap food means importing unemployment. "Your people have rejected GM food," said Vivek Cariappa, an organic farmer from southern India who is active in his country's thriving anti-GM movement. "Where will it go? It won't go into the sea. It will go to countries like ours." With careful honesty, Ruddock explained to the farmers that their British colleagues, on the whole, don't share their concerns: "Britain has been run as multinational farming enterprises with subsidies from the CAP. It is mostly people in urban areas, pressure groups, pushing for change in agricultural practice, except for a small organic minority." When Juli Cariappa asked if Britain really wants to leave its food basket in the hands of the multinationals, Ruddock paused, looked her in the eye, and said, reluctantly, "Yes."

If the biotech companies have their way we could soon be on course for William Gibson's nightmare future, in which the rich eat real food grown by artisan farmers and the poor eat genetically engineered "vat stuff" when they eat at all. As long as food is treated as a commodity like any other and traded to maximize profits, there is little chance of a reduction in world hunger or of a significantly safer diet for the fortunate few. As Tim Lang puts it, "We have to see that it is the production of food that matters, not just its consumption." Or, in the crisp words of José Bové, "We are faced with a real choice for society. Either we accept intensive production and the huge reduction in the number of farmers in the sole interests of the World Market, or we create a farmer's agriculture for the benefit of everyone." The shape-shifting global coalition that tripped the advance of genetically modified crops in Europe and staged the carnival of protest in Seattle has its work cut out for it. But the genie is out of the bottle. Food—which in its progress from seed to stomach links ecology, labor, poverty, trade, culture and health—will be a key item on the menu of the next century's struggles for democracy against the arbitrary power of the giant corporations. ■

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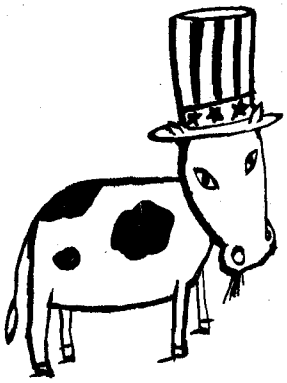
US CORPORATIONS ARE WORKING FURIOUSLY TO HOLD BACK THE TIDE OF PROTEST.

Food Fight Comes to America

JOHN STAUBER



SCOTT MENCHIN

As the international uprising against genetically engineered (GE) foods continues to grow, the worst fear of US government and business officials is that the commotion abroad will awaken Americans, who unknowingly already consume biotech foods being rejected in Europe. The victories of their foreign counterparts, meanwhile, are providing fresh inspiration for US food activists, some of whom have struggled for decades to win media coverage, citizen attention and regulatory action. The Food and Drug Administration has officially opposed biotech food labeling and mandatory safety testing since 1992 [see Kristi Coale, facing page]. But now that Europeans are forcing American companies to segregate and label genetically engineered foods, it is much more difficult to claim that the same can't be done in the United States.

Last summer was a watershed event for many US farmers, who planted Monsanto's biotech corn and soybeans, only to find them rejected abroad. Some are shifting back to traditional varieties, at least until the crisis is resolved. Gary Goldberg, CEO of the American Corn Growers Association, suggested in November that farmers avoid genetically engineered seed corn and try to obtain non-engineered varieties before farmer demand depletes supplies of old-fashioned seed.

The US food and biotechnology industries are now in full "crisis management" mode, their PR experts and lobbyists working furiously to prevent the same kind of defeat suffered on foreign shores. One example is the recently launched Alliance for Better Foods, run from the DC office of the PR/lobby firm BSMG, which also represents Monsanto and Philip Morris, America's largest food company. Monsanto's PR firm Burson-Marsteller recently bused 100 members of a Washington, DC, Baptist church to stage a pro-GE-foods rally outside an FDA hearing. But if events in Europe are any guide, the momentum may have shifted to a new alliance of grassroots environmentalists, consumer activists and family farmers. The *Los Angeles Times* noted in October that "a storm of protest...has reached US shores, leading some experts to predict that agricultural biotechnology could go the way of nuclear energy—falling out of favor because of public fears and unfavorable economics."

The key to any successful biotech "issue management" campaign is repeating simple but carefully chosen messages that can set the terms of the debate. This was true with Monsanto's genetically engineered bovine growth hormone (rBGH), administered to cows to increase milk output. In the case of rBGH, one message was that "the milk is the same." This isn't true, and changes in the milk are a reason the drug hasn't been approved by Europe or Canada. But the message worked here, where, after a furious PR and lobbying campaign, the FDA approved the use of rBGH and allowed sales of dairy products without consumer labeling. Six years later, Monsanto claims that one-third of US cows are in herds injected daily with rBGH.

Another simple but effective PR tactic, known as "the third-party technique," puts messages in the mouths of independent-seeming experts, such as scientists and doctors, whom journalists and the public are more likely to trust. Besides government "watchdogs" at the FDA and the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), such messengers can include former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, the AMA and its prestigious publication *Journal of the American Medical Association*, and the American Dietetic Association. All these and more have vouched for rBGH, and we can expect an avalanche of similar trusted experts reassuring us about biotech foods in the months ahead. Meanwhile, many right-wing pro-industry groups have launched their own PR campaigns against the "fearmongering" of consumer and environmental activists. At Thanksgiving, for example, the National Center for Public Policy Research faxed to newsrooms a release headlined ACTIVISTS ATTACK BIO-ENGINEERED FOOD DESPITE BENEFITS TO THE POOR AND THE SICK. All these tactics would fail, of course, if the media did their job by thoroughly investigating and reporting the issue of genetically engineered foods, and that is why media management is the number-one goal of every PR campaign.

As its ultimate weapon, industry has successfully lobbied into law "agricultural product disparagement" statutes that give them new powers to sue people who criticize their products. The first such lawsuit was filed in Texas against Oprah Winfrey and her guest Howard Lyman for the crime of airing a public debate on mad cow disease and its risks in the United States. A jury ruled in Oprah's favor, prompting her to crow that "free speech rocks." The reality is that her case is on appeal, and she has spent more than $2 million thus far in legal bills that she will never get back. Food-disparagement statutes survive intact in Texas and twelve other states, and this shot across the bow of the media has already had a chilling impact on coverage of other food controversies.

One of the smartest moves by Monsanto in the rBGH fight was hiring Carol Tucker Foreman, an influential and well-connected Democratic insider and lobbyist. Previously, Foreman had been the executive director of the DC-based Consumer Federation of America and then, under President Jimmy Carter, an Assistant Secretary of Agriculture. Soon after her stint at USDA she launched her own DC lobby firm with many corporate clients. While paid by Monsanto to lobby for rBGH, Foreman also co-

John Stauber is executive director of the Center for Media & Democracy and founder of PR Watch, *a quarterly journal that investigates corporate and government propaganda (www.prwatch.org). He is co-author of* Toxic Sludge Is Good For You! *and* Mad Cow USA, *both published by Common Courage.*

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ordinated the Safe Food Coalition, whose members include a number of big Washington-based nonprofits such as Consumer Federation of America and the Center for Science in the Public Interest. Running the coalition allowed Foreman to maintain dual identities as both a consumer advocate and a corporate food lobbyist. Earlier this year Foreman left her lobby firm and returned to the Consumer Federation of America, where she now says she favors labeling genetically engineered foods.

Another major Washington food lobbyist is Michael Jacobson, the executive director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, an advocacy group dubbed "the food police" by industry for its attention-getting news conferences against unhealthy fats and sugars in the American diet. When it comes to biotech foods, however, CSPI has been less vigilant, failing to oppose Monsanto's rBGH during the long struggle over its approval. Jacobson now frets that mandatory labeling of genetically engineered food sold in supermarkets, as called for in a bill introduced in November by Representative Dennis Kucinich, could kill a goose he hopes will lay genetically engineered golden eggs such as "increased yields, reduced toxins, increased nutrient levels, and modified fatty acid composition."

If inside-the-Beltway groups like CSPI and CFA are conflicted and unlikely to lead the charge to gain mandatory safety testing and consumer labeling of GE foods, who is? A broad array of seasoned activists has been fighting this battle for a long time, among them author Jeremy Rifkin, attorneys with the Center for Food Safety, the Rural Advancement Foundation International–USA, the National Family Farm Coalition, the Council for Responsible Genetics, Consumers Union (publisher of *Consumer Reports*) and the Union of Concerned Scientists. In meetings this year a number of these organizations and others formed the Genetic Engineering Action Network, which is united around four objectives: mandatory safety testing of GE foods, mandatory consumer labeling if they pass safety tests, long-term industry liability to cover unforeseen problems and an end to the domination of food and agriculture by "supermarket to the world" companies.

No one involved in the US fight expects it to be quick or easy. Says Ronnie Cummins of the Organic Consumers Association, "We have to do what Europe and Japan have done—build a powerful organized movement of farmers, consumers and environmental activists who will target and boycott companies." Recently the FDA held three public hearings on genetically engineered foods. Critics call them staged events and dog-and-pony shows, but they have provided a media forum for advocates of safety testing and labeling. The activists want biotech foods off the market entirely until a rigorous system of health and ecological testing has been devised. Like their colleagues in Europe, they are promoting the Precautionary Principle—the common-sense maxim of "looking before you leap"—as the basis for public policy. Adherence to the Precautionary Principle would obviously have dire consequences for companies whose bottom-line profits depend on selling as many biotech foods as quickly as possible, but it seems a minimal level of protection against the inevitable unforeseen consequences of genetically engineering the world's food supply. ■

Don't Look, Don't Find

In an editorial published last spring, *The Economist* asserted that Americans weren't protesting genetically modified (GM) foods because they had too much faith in their regulatory system. If so, a close look into the regulatory process should cause massive disillusionment.

The regulatory system for genetically modified products is based on what many scientists believe is faulty logic, spelled out in a May 1992 Federal Register notice. The very title, "Foods Derived from New Plant Varieties," says a lot about how the FDA looks at GM foods: The agency sees no difference between a plant that is the product of traditional breeding methods and one generated through biotechnology. Based on this assumption, the FDA engages in a policy of "Don't Look, Don't Find."

What the FDA and the companies don't look for is any change in the plant resulting from the addition of a modified gene from a different plant or other organism. The FDA thus ignores some basic scientific realities of genetic engineering, namely that the introduction of a new gene into the genome of a plant has the potential to interfere with the ordinary functions of that plant. So a new gene could trigger the production of new antinutrients, toxins and allergens that scientists won't notice because the tests they use aren't designed to look for these compounds.

The absence of this type of testing was among the things the FDA's own researchers pointed out during the crafting of this policy during the Bush Administration. In documents obtained as part of a lawsuit brought by the Alliance for Bio-Integrity and several university scientists against the FDA—and made public this fall—agency scientists pointed out that the type of analysis proposed couldn't possibly detect changes in levels of toxins or the development of new toxins. And as the FDA policy evolved over time, these agency researchers lamented that the science was disappearing. In the end the FDA put together what several agency researchers referred to as a "what do I have to do to avoid trouble" document. One FDA scientist commented that the policy "reads like a biotech redbook...very pro-industry."

One place to look for an explanation for how this happened is the Bush White House. In 1991 the White House Council on Competitiveness released a report that spelled out its proposal for promoting the biotechnology industry; it included insuring that regulations were not created in such a way as to be a burden on the industry. Vice President Dan Quayle, the Administration point person on the council, later described the regulations as part of the President's "regulatory relief program." Quayle described the US biotechnology industry as the world leader and added, "We want to keep it that way."

There was also help for industry inside the FDA in the person of Michael Taylor, a lawyer who had previously worked for King & Spalding, Monsanto's external counsel for regulatory matters. Taylor had approval authority over regulations the agency crafted on GM foods, and his decisions resulted in the final policy. Taylor is now Monsanto's vice president of public policy and head of the Monsanto Public Policy Institute.

Monsanto and its competitors are collaborating on a public relations campaign to combat the negative publicity the agrochemical industry has received over GM foods. Perhaps coincidentally, the FDA is also on a campaign swing, hosting a series of town hall meetings in the hopes of allaying concerns of an increasingly wary US public. In the process, both will find out whether the faith as defined by *The Economist* truly exists. KRISTI COALE

Kristi Coale is an associate with the San Francisco–based Center for Investigative Reporting. Her work was funded by the center's Fund for Investigative Reporting on the Environment.

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CORPORATE DONATIONS GO A LONG WAY TOWARD EXPLAINING WEAK US FOOD POLICY.

Food Money

MICAH L. SIFRY

Remember the old adage about not wanting to see how sausage—or legislation—is really made? What happens when the people who make sausage also make legislation?

Each year, an estimated 5,000 Americans die and another 77 million get sick from disease-producing agents in the food they eat. The E. coli O157:H7 bacterium alone sickens about 70,000 people a year. Yet Congress continues to turn back efforts to address this grave threat to public health. Since the beginning of 1995, individuals and PACs connected with the meat and poultry industry have given nearly $6.9 million to Congressional candidates and party committees, according to data supplied by the Center for Responsive Politics. A whopping 78 percent of their contributions have gone to Republicans.

SCOTT MENCHIN

Thus, despite dramatic changes in the technology of meat and poultry production, food-safety practices have not changed appreciably since Teddy Roosevelt's day, when Congress mandated carcass-by-carcass inspections. Amazingly, Agriculture Department inspectors do not have the power to assess civil fines for unsanitary conditions in meatpacking plants, though the USDA can punish circuses for mistreating elephants and penalize watermelon salesmen for failing to keep appropriate records. But faced with safety violations by meat and poultry packers, its main options are either to shut down a plant totally, launch criminal proceedings or, more typically, negotiate voluntary recalls of tainted products.

In June 1998 Congresswoman Nita Lowey offered an amendment to the agriculture appropriations bill that would have given the Agriculture Department the power to assess fines. The House Appropriations Committee rejected it by a vote of 25 to 19. On average, the twenty-five members who voted against Lowey's motion received six times as many campaign contributions from the meat and poultry industry in the 1997–98 election cycle as did the nineteen who voted for it.

That's just one example of money's power in food politics. Often, the weight of campaign contributions is so heavy that an issue never even comes to a vote. Such is the case with genetically modified food. The four leaders of the biotech industry, Dow, Du Pont, Monsanto and Novartis, have given just over $3.5 million in PAC, soft-money and large individual contributions since 1995, three-quarters to Republicans. And these contributions have helped substantially in getting a hands-off approach from Congress and regulators. For example, the FDA approved the use of bovine growth hormone for cows, going so far as to issue regulations wanted by Monsanto, rBGH's producer, that made it appear to be illegal to label milk as rBGH-produced or rBGH-free. There have been notably few efforts in Congress to take up the question of alerting consumers or limiting the use of genetically modified products. A bill introduced this fall by Representative Dennis Kucinich has just twenty co-sponsors.

When the issue does get joined, big money from agriculture interests weighs down the balance scale. That's what happened with the critical issues of price supports and the rising concentration of farm ownership. Three years ago Congress adopted the Freedom to Farm act, phasing out the system of commodity price supports and acreage set-asides that has protected the nation's farmers from the vagaries of the marketplace since the Depression. It cleared the Senate by a vote of 64 to 32. Passage of the law was a high priority for agriculture interests, which poured, through PACs and large individual contributions, nearly $30 million into Congressional campaign coffers in 1995–96. The senators who voted for the bill received 66 percent more, on average, in campaign contributions from agribusiness than those who opposed it.

Three years later, the results of the Freedom to Farm bill are becoming clear: Consumers haven't benefited, family farms are being decimated and taxpayers are footing the bill. Crop prices have fallen dramatically—corn by nearly a third, soybeans and hogs by more than a third and wheat by almost a half. Much of this is a result of overproduction by US farmers.

These price drops have not been passed on to consumers. The cost of most foodstuffs at the supermarket has stayed flat. Flush with cash, the big corporate farmers and food processors have embarked on a wave of mergers and buyouts. Four firms control nearly 90 percent of the US cereal market. Three control more than 81 percent of the beef-slaughtering industry. This year, more than half the nation's food will be grown on the largest 4 percent of farms. At the same time, thousands of family farms are going out of business, driven to desperation by falling crop prices and unbearable debt burdens.

Hearing the cries from the farm belt, Congress voted $6 billion in emergency aid last year and a similar amount this past fall. But Congress has taken no action to insure that lower prices are passed on to consumers, or to explore the economic and environmental implications of the concentration of ownership in the agricultural sector. Indeed, an amendment by Senator Paul Wellstone seeking to impose an eighteen-month moratorium on agribusiness mergers and acquisitions was recently defeated in the Senate, 71 to 27. Senators voting against Wellstone's amendment have received almost twice as much, on average, in contributions from agriculture interests over the past six years as those voting for the moratorium. ■

Micah L. Sifry writes the biweekly e-mail bulletin "OUCH! How Money in Politics Hurts You," for Public Campaign. To subscribe, send a one-line e-mail to majordomo@linuxcare.com reading "subscribe ouch".

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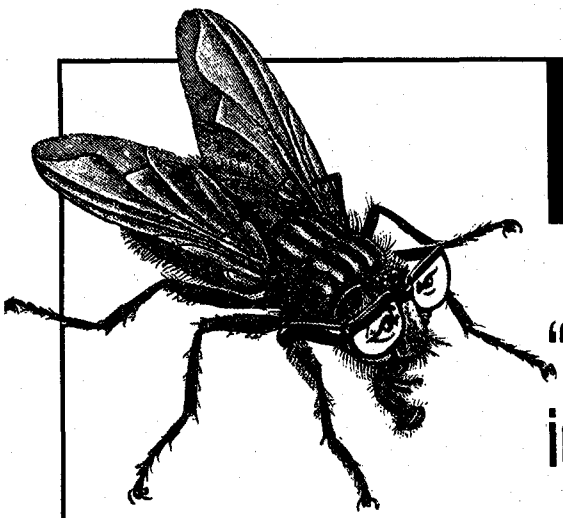

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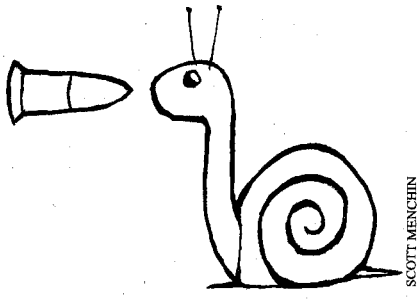
THIRD WORLD FARMERS SEE IN BIOTECH CROPS A FIRST WORLD DISASTER IN THE MAKING.

The Parable of the Golden Snail

PETER ROSSET



SCOTT MENCHIN

When a group of Filipino farmers were asked recently for their thoughts on genetically engineered rice seeds, a peasant leader responded with what might be called the Parable of the Golden Snail. It seems that rice farmers have long supplemented the protein in their diet with local snails that live in rice paddies. At the time of the Marcos dictatorship, Imelda Marcos had the idea of introducing a snail from South America that was said to be more productive and, as such, a means to help end hunger and protein malnutrition. But no one liked the taste, and the project was abandoned. The snails, however, escaped, driving the local snail species to the brink of extinction—thus eliminating a key protein source—and forcing peasants to apply toxic pesticides to keep them from eating the young rice plants. "So when you ask what we think of the new GE rice seeds, we say that's easy," the leader said. "They are another Golden Snail."

Third World governments and farmers are being told over and over again that genetically engineered seeds are being created to end hunger and that they should brush aside other concerns in the name of ending it quickly. Yet the reality is that far more than enough food exists today to provide an adequate diet for every human being on the planet. In fact, overproduction is a leading problem. The truth is that many people are too poor to have access to the abundance around them. Furthermore, the diverse, integrated farming systems found on smaller farms can be far more productive than the uniform monocultures that genetically engineered seeds are designed for. Meanwhile, patents on life allow biotech companies to privatize the genomes of crop varieties bred by farmers, without compensation, while the escape of novel genes through pollen threatens local crop varieties and food security.

Five hundred angry South Asian farmers recently took a bus caravan across Europe to dramatize their opposition to genetically engineered crops and the free-trade measures embodied in the World Trade Organization. They say that WTO regulations allowing transnational corporations to patent germ plasm from seeds their ancestors have bred over millennia amounts to "biopiracy." Indian peasant leader Lal Shankar called their struggle "a fight of indigenous agriculture and traditional systems against the North-dominated gene technology and free market." He added, "They are stealing and creating hybrid seeds and then selling them back to us." Indian farmers have singled out biotech giant Monsanto for its heavily hyped public relations claims and full-page ads about ending hunger. Last year the Karnataka State Farmers' Association, which claims 10 million Indian peasants as members, announced its "Cremate Monsanto" campaign. Since then they have been publicly burning Monsanto's experimental plots in India. In London, on the caravan, farmer Kumud Chowdury said, "My husband is taking care of our farm, while I am here to kill Monsanto before it kills families like mine."

In Brazil, the powerful Landless Workers' Movement (MST) has made stopping Monsanto soybeans a top priority, vowing to destroy any genetically engineered crops planted in Rio Grande do Sul state, where the sympathetic governor has banned them. Meanwhile, a Brazilian federal court judge has suspended commercial release of Monsanto's soy pending further testing. In Mexico, where the maize plant originated when it was bred in pre-Columbian times from wild relatives, Mexican farmers still maintain 25,000 native varieties. Fears that pollen from imported, genetically engineered corn could contaminate and irreversibly damage this invaluable genetic heritage recently led the Mexican government to announce a ban on its import from the United States. Meanwhile Mexico's largest corn-flour company moved to calm consumer fears by eliminating genetically engineered corn from its products.

In Thailand, the government, consumers, environmentalists and even exporters are concerned about genetically engineered crops. Arriving there in mid-October to attend a conference, I found that such foods were the number-one topic in newspapers, on television and even among people on the streets. On October 13 the Thai government slapped a temporary ban on genetically engineered seeds, just as a controversy exploded over genetically engineered cotton plants being grown illegally by farmers near a Monsanto experimental plot. Thai environmental and consumer organizations immediately voiced their opposition to such crops because of their impact on native biodiversity and food safety. With the new ban in place, the commerce minister suggested that Thailand capitalize on the concerns of European consumers by promoting Thai food exports internationally as free from genetic engineering. Thai cooking oil and seasoning exporters rushed to jump on the bandwagon.

It seems that Filipino peasants are not the only ones concerned about a repeat of the Golden Snail. Growing legions throughout the Third World are asking if they really need these so-called miracle seeds. Certainly the sordid history of technology "altruistically" sent by the North to solve the problems of the South—like large dams that displace thousands, only to silt up rapidly, or pesticides that poison millions, only to become ineffective as pests develop resistance—is enough to make anyone think twice about Golden Snails and magic bullets. ■

Peter Rosset, PhD, executive director of Food First/The Institute for Food and Development Policy, is co-author of World Hunger: Twelve Myths *(Grove). More information on these topics may be found at www.foodfirst.org.*

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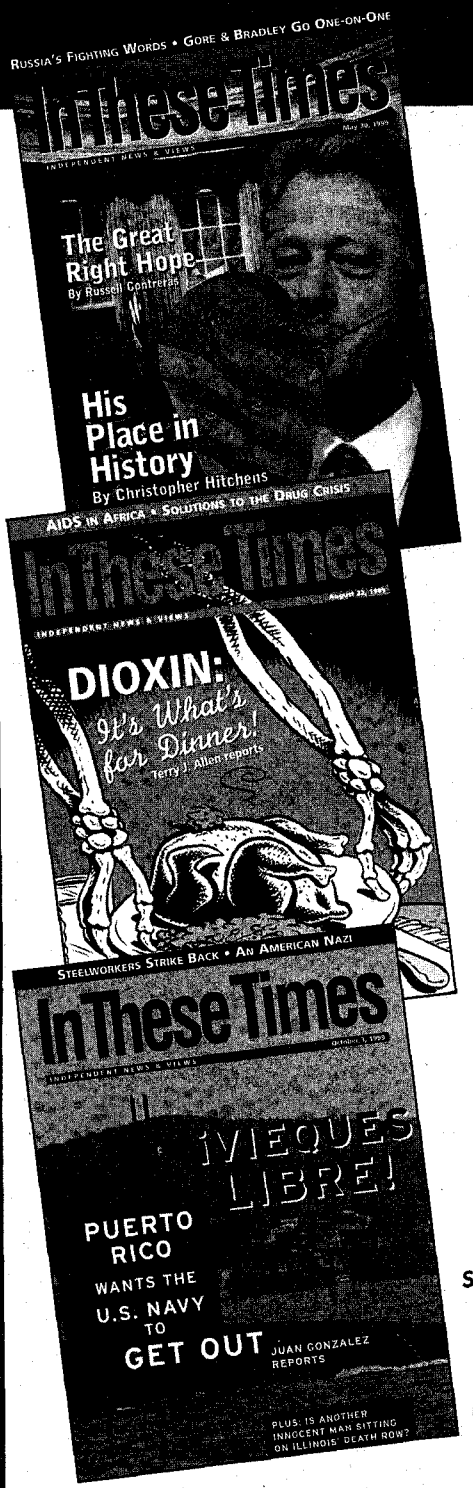
Never needed more than it is today.

—Noam Chomsky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EXCHANGE
CONTINUED

Punk & Political

(Continued From Page 2)

provide a voice for an alienated group with needs that were ill championed elsewhere. Try to tell someone who finally feels understood, acknowledged and affirmed that there is anything small or insignificant about that moment.

Add to what Temple mentioned other contributions of artists like Sleater Kinney's involvement in Free to Fight, the Home Alive Self Defense program and benefit CDs supported by Seattle artists and founded in part by Valerie Agnew of 7 Year Bitch, musician donation support for the Mia Zapata Investigative Fund, Rage Against the Machine raising support for causes from Leonard Peltier to the Zapatistas and supporting the Tibetan Freedom Concerts, the Rock for Choice benefit concerts and benefit CDs organized by L7 and supported by artists from Lunachicks to Henry Rollins, Krist Novoselic's involvement in the Joint Artists and Music Promotions Political Action Committee and the multitude of other punk-associated, -influenced and -supported causes. In my local area there are punk bands that participate in benefit shows for homeless shelters, AIDS outreach, animal shelters, domestic violence shelters, cancer research organizations and environmental causes. There are punk e-mail lists that provide a flow of petitions and political updates to subscribers. Acknowledge it or not, the bands and fans have something to be proud of. TIFFANY BAGBY

Brooklyn, N.Y.

■ Finally! It's about time *The Nation* published articles like those by Angela Ards ["Organizing the Hip-Hop Generation," July 26/Aug.2] and Johnny Temple's "Noise From Underground." I hope this begins a new trend in *The Nation*'s reporting with fresh, relevant voices. America's musical mainstream is crowded with groups that say nothing socially relevant. If there's a message it's this: Buy, react and conform. It has always been the responsibility of the underground to push from below to challenge those above to see the true face of their society. As Temple points out, it's time for underground artists across all strata to build partnerships with activists and community groups that share the same interest: sustaining a true democracy where people, not profits, rule.

As an artist myself, I resent the label "generation X" or "slacker." For my group of young (20s and 30s) artists/activists, reality is starkly different. We strive every day to challenge the current system of injustice and inequity through a combination of art and community activism, whether it be poetry, music or film. And for many of us it was punk rock that set us on the path. It gave us a loud, angry voice for our frustration and disillusionment.

Musical activities like the hip-hop benefit for political prisoners at New York City's Bowery Ballroom or the Human Rights benefit show featuring a host of punk bands prove that the underground is alive and well. A great first step to increase the impact of such events would be to unite the underground punk and hip-hop music worlds. Each has a strong voice with a clear message: We will not allow our voices not to be heard, our rights denied or our freedom compromised. ANTONINO D'AMBROSIO

TEMPLE REPLIES

Brooklyn, N.Y.

■ For better or worse, punk rock is represented across the political spectrum. This is one reason it's impossible to characterize a singular punk experience. My article was an overview of current leftist activism in underground rock and its relationship—or lack thereof—with more socially mainstream progressive movements. In the volatile and fractured world of punk, it comes as no surprise that the piece would provoke a wide range of opinions.

It is encouraging to read the letters from Jessica Hopper, Kimberly Doss-Cortes, Lorena Fuller, Tiffany Bagby and Antonino D'Ambrosio, who appreciate the potential contribution of punk to the sedate leftism of the nineties. They have all witnessed the media's hatchet job of the rock underground over the past two decades. In the late eighties, media attention was lavished upon the abhorrent activities of neo-Nazi punks. Then in the early nineties, when major record labels began signing up underground bands by the dozen, commercial advertisers waited on deck, eager to mine the imagery of anger and cynicism. Punks now grace TV screens in beer and car commercials. Although this repulsive commodification process has diluted the aggression and vitality in underground music, many punks—leftist and neo-Nazi alike—are relatively undeterred, never having looked to television and glossy magazines for cultural guidance in the first place.

Kevin Mattson contends that progressives shouldn't waste their time with punks. Not having extended himself to Mark Andersen or Positive Force since his departure from the group thirteen years ago, Mattson is understandably unaware of what the group actually does. Positive Force is run by volunteers and has never limited its activities to punk rock concerts and fundraising; its current schedule includes grocery delivery to the homebound elderly and the ongoing development of a community center in DC that will focus on direct service to the surrounding low-income community.

As for the inception of Positive Force, I stand corrected: The group was initially conceived by punk organizers along with other young people, including non-punk high school activists. This inaccuracy was born of my own experience: When I was introduced to the group in 1987 (and I was immediately enlisted to night staffing duties at a homeless shelter), Mattson and his crew were long gone. Yet in the clique-ridden world of underground rock, the raggedy Positive Force house in Arlington, Virginia, was then, and is now, one of the few havens for serious political thought, discussion and action. Anyone who has been to a Positive Force event will likely scoff at the notion of it being some sort of hipster in-group, a niche for marketers, inherently exclusive. No need to take my word—readers can see for themselves: Positive Force meetings are held every Saturday at 1:30 PM, and they are open to everyone (3510 N. 8th Street, Arlington, Virginia; phone: 703-276-9768). Obviously the creativity and vigor in the underground will not by itself transform our culture, but punk rock continues to be an important point of entry into radical politics for many young people. And the broadening scope of leftist punk activism is reflected in many organizing efforts, including that of Jeff Guntzel, who recently accompanied a fact-finding Congressional delegation to Iraq as part of his work with Voices in the Wilderness.

Some of Mattson's gripes would perhaps have been more appropriately lodged with the letter writers from San Francisco (Ekedal et al.), whose cartoonish portrait of punk rock flies in the face of reality: Most punks come from white, middle-class families—not exactly the most downtrodden folks in America. This is not intended to ignore or denigrate the abuse, trauma and ostracism suffered by many punks, but who is served by Ekedal and friends' devotion to obscurity and disengagement, other than themselves?

With a slightly longer attention span, Ekedal et al. would have noticed examples of current punk activism in my article beyond the work of Fugazi and Rage Against the Machine. In any case, Fugazi is one of the few bands that have rejected lucrative offers from giant music conglomerates and can't be lumped in with the mainstream—its contributions to independent rock (detailed in my article) are unparalleled. While an argument can be made that Rage Against the Machine should not be considered an underground band because of its prosperous liaison with Epic Records (a division of Sony Music), the band's fervent commitment to issues of social justice sets it apart from the vast majority of successful mainstream musicians, whose political apathy is a disconcerting sign of the times. Fortunately—as most of these letters attest—Ekedal et al.'s nihilism is not echoed in the increasingly sophisticated, dynamic and inclusive political visions arising from a different zone of the punk underground.

JOHNNY TEMPLE

CORRECTION

In Micah L. Sifry's "Public Citizen No. 1" [Dec. 20], Carl Mayer, although he *is* among those urging Nader to run, was incorrectly identified as a member of the Draft Nader Committee. Also, the town of Amherst is in Wisconsin, not Michigan.

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

Kosovo: On Ends and Means

GEORGE KENNEY

THE NEW MILITARY HUMANISM: Lessons From Kosovo.
By Noam Chomsky.
Common Courage. 199 pp. $15.95.

The spectacle of human beings acting out mindless violence through pack behavior instills more terror in the heart than perhaps any other event in the natural world. State-directed violence, capable of wielding today's deadliest technology, especially evokes nightmarish thoughts about apocalyptic ends. But science has not worked overtime to find a satisfactory explanation for collective madness and, not surprisingly, has not produced one. Literature and the visual arts have done their best to pick up the slack. William Golding articulated our fear of human wilding in *Lord of the Flies*. George Orwell gave the psychology an overt political spin in *Animal Farm*, as did C.S. Lewis from a Christian perspective in *That Hideous Strength*. Inspiration runs the gamut from highbrow to lowbrow. George Romero's film *Night of the Living Dead* belongs to the genre, for example, and is notable for having transformed a primordial terror into an image so alien it can be laughed away. In reality, though, this fear won't go away. It can't, because we all feel a subtle pull of unaccountable madness. And life demands of us, some more than others, a relentless struggle to explain these elemental experiences for which language apparently has not—yet—acquired the proper constructs.

Noam Chomsky's book *The New Military Humanism: Lessons From Kosovo*, ably demonstrates how far we've come and, inadvertently, suggests how far there is to go. Chomsky contends that almost everything you have read or heard or seen on television about Kosovo has been a partial truth or outright falsehood. For a general readership such an assertion would seem like fiction, as if *Animal Farm* were actually our controlled society. And Chomsky goes further, asserting that after NATO's war for Kosovo the malicious use of American power has become, more than ever before, the dominant fact of international politics. He writes, "It could be argued, rather plausibly, that further demolition of the rules of world order is by now of no significance, as in the late 1930s. The contempt of the world's leading power for the framework of world order has become so extreme that there is little left to discuss." The scope and audacity of Chomsky's critique stagger the imagination. To call it radical practically misses the point. On the one hand we have the established media, the respectable community of foreign affairs analysts, the government—and on the other, Noam Chomsky. Assuming he is right, or even partly right, a question begs to be asked: How is it possible for things to be so out of kilter? Alternatively, what sets Chomsky's critique apart from common conspiracy theories?

Chomsky hasn't a novelist's eye for moral dilemmas, but his examples form a damning indictment of the 'humanitarian' rationale.

Chomsky rather sensibly assembles a thick file of facts, carefully documented in endnotes, to buttress his assertions. He weaves these into a highly persuasive big picture of media and government shenanigans. So far, so good. But clearly he is not writing for those who are not already interested in his ideas. He meanders, he repeats himself, he overindulges his sarcastic streak and he doesn't organize his arguments, at least not so you'd notice; Chomsky needed an editor to impose more discipline. The reader might imagine herself scouring a beach with a metal detector looking for nuggets—of which there are plenty. And when it comes to the "How is this possible?" question, Chomsky assumes the reader's more than casual familiarity with his voluminous past writings, in particular *Manufacturing Consent* (co-written with Edward Herman). In any case, he completely ignores the magnitude of the problem. Marxists, or anarcho-syndicalists—which may describe

George Kenney, who writes frequently on foreign affairs, resigned from the State Department's Yugoslavia desk in 1992 in protest over Bush Administration policy in the region.

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Chomsky's political leanings—or other Old Left activists may shrug this question off, thinking it answered a thousand times before. Others are left with a vague and ultimately quite unsatisfying impression that somehow it is simultaneously in all these individuals' (reporters, editors, producers, publishers, experts, government officials, military officers, etc.) self-interest to deceive the world while behaving badly.

What's missing is a novelist's eye and ear for individual moral dilemmas that have aggregated onto a grand scale, because what Chomsky has gotten ahold of, perhaps without realizing it, is the question of evil. Individually, the people Chomsky criticizes, or many of them, are not only acting out of self-interest but also know that they are doing something wrong. Lying to the public is wrong, their small, insistent voices of conscience tell them. Arbitrarily killing innocent people is wrong. Hatemongering in an attempt to vilify an entire people (the Serbs) is wrong. When reporters or analysts or government officials do these things, they also must work to suppress their voice of conscience. Evil, in other words, doesn't need horns and a tail, just a bureaucratically structured environment that helps convince people of their false selves. Some notion of morality, or whatever you wish to call it, must enter the equation; otherwise Chomsky's masterly descriptions of group psychology gone haywire don't provide any exit. No morality, no choice, no redemption. No reform. We will all be stuck living in *Animal Farm* forever!

As an example of Chomsky's reasoning, we might look at the issue of how many Albanians were killed by Serbs, taking advantage of reports that have appeared in the press since the book was published, as well as material available to Chomsky at his time of writing. This morbid issue of the death toll, by the way, is not one Chomsky tackles head on, but its reportage by government and media conforms perfectly to his thesis. As he says,

> It is unusual for the resort to violence to be supported with argumentation so feeble. One might conjecture that advocates of the escalation of atrocities in Kosovo [e.g., bombing] recognized at some level that constructing a justification posed some non-trivial problems. That might account for the outburst of virulent race-hatred and jingoism, a phenomenon I have not seen in my lifetime since the hysteria whipped up about 'the Japs' during World War II, vermin who must be crushed—unlike the Germans, fellow humans who had strayed.

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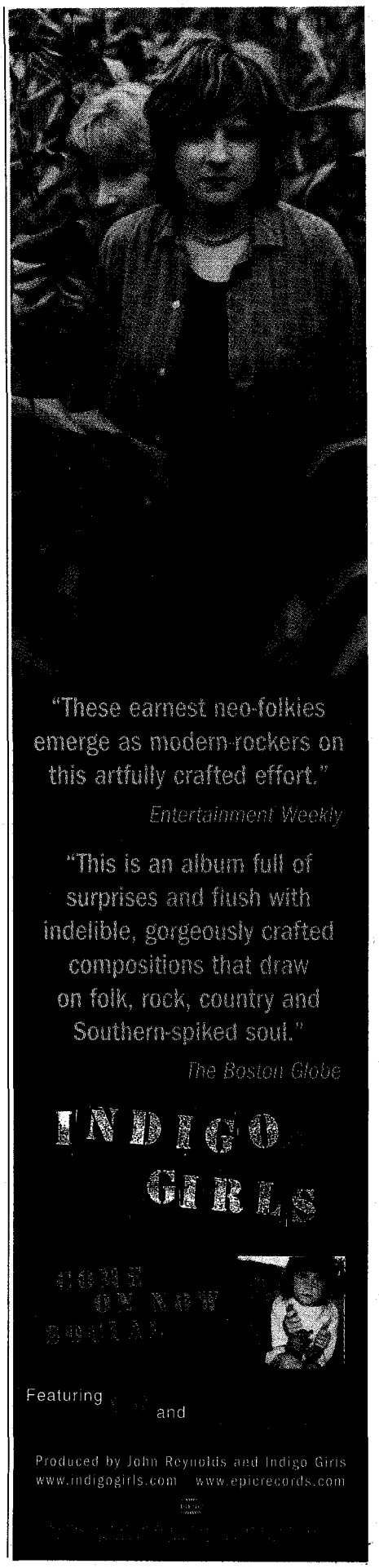
On March 18, the day the Rambouillet talks broke down, David Scheffer, the State Department's ambassador at large for war crimes issues, proclaimed that "we have upwards to about 100,000 men that we cannot account for" in Kosovo. Depending upon the sophistication of the press organ involved, this statement was variously construed as a warning or, as the New York *Daily News* put it in a headline the next day, 100,000 KOSOVAR MEN FEARED DEAD. The specter of mass murder critically supported public acceptance of NATO airstrikes, which began less than a week later, on March 24. After two months of bombing, the Yugoslav regime was still, to the Administration's deepening chagrin, in the fight. By this time there were increasing murmurs of discontent in the press regarding the effect of NATO airstrikes on unmistakably civilian targets. Ambassador Scheffer stepped to the plate again in mid-May, calling for "speedy investigations" of war crimes (by Serbs) while now noting that "as many as 225,000 ethnic Albanian men aged between 14 and 59 remain unaccounted for." Several wire services quoted him on different days as saying that "with the exception of Rwanda in 1994 and Cambodia in 1975, you would be hard-pressed to find a crime scene anywhere in the world since World War II where a defenseless civilian population has been assaulted with such ferocity and criminal intent, and suffered so many multiple violations of humanitarian law in such a short period of time as in Kosovo since mid-March 1999." It was a profoundly ignorant remark, of course, but what's important is that the Administration's laserlike focus on allegations and innuendoes of genocidal acts securely established the legitimacy of continued bombing for an at-that-time unknown, perhaps lengthy period.

Helpfully sensing that Washington—Scheffer and a battalion of like-minded flacks—had gone too far out on a limb, in June and July the British started publicizing their reduced estimate that 10,000 Albanian Kosovars had been killed. For whatever reason that number stuck in establishment circles. In fact, however, it appears to be still too many. The actual number is probably somewhere in the low thousands.

In mid-July sources from the NATO-led peacekeeping force in Kosovo, known as KFOR, were telling the press that of 2,150 bodies found by peacekeepers only 850 were victims of massacres. Nevertheless, still eager to bolster the Serb=devil argument, National Security Adviser Sandy Berger, in an address to the Council on Foreign Relations on July 26, poignantly mentioned "the village of Ljubenic, the largest mass-grave site discovered so far from this conflict, with as many as 350 bodies." Berger may not have been aware that the Italian in charge of the site, Brig. Gen. Mauro Del Vecchio, had told the press several days earlier that the exhumation had been completed at the site and that seven bodies had been found. All press mention of Ljubenic ceases after that point.

On September 23 *El País*, a mainstream Madrid paper, reported that Spanish forensic investigators sent to Kosovo had found no proof of genocide. The team, which had experience in Rwanda, had been told to expect to perform more than 2,000 autopsies in one of the areas worst hit by fighting, but it found only 187 bodies to examine. No mass graves and, for the most part, no signs of torture. And when on October 10 other investigators announced that no bodies had been found in the Trepca mine complex, long rumored to contain as many as 700 corpses, skepticism burst into the open. First out of the gate was a Web site called Stratfor.com, a sort of wannabe *Jane's Intelligence Review*, which in a long article concluded that "bodies numbering only in the hundreds have been found," while taking care not to judge the final outcome prematurely. Though it raised the right questions, Stratfor's estimate was too low because of sloppy research, something symptomatic of much of its work. It was, nevertheless, widely cited. The debate raced around the Internet, popped up in Alexander Cockburn's November 8 *Nation* column (which was recycled as an Op-Ed in the *Los Angeles Times*), found space in another author's opinion column in the Amsterdam *De Volkskrant* and then emerged as a very lengthy news story in the *Sunday Times* of London. The *Sunday Times* added an interview with the head of the Spanish team, Emilio Perez Pujol, who was "disillusioned" by the "war propaganda machine." Pujol says the death toll may never exceed 2,500.

Until recently the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia kept out of the debate, except indirectly in late August when it was quick to deny the figure of 11,000 dead that Kosovo's UN civilian administrator, Bernard Kouchner, was then touting. But on November 10 Carla Del Ponte, chief prosecutor for the ICTY, reported to the UN Security Council that its investigators had found 2,108 bodies at 195 sites, out of 529 reported locales. Del Ponte cautioned that it was an interim figure and that evidence of grave tampering did exist; Ljubenic and Trepca sites made notorious in press reports were found not to contain masses of bodies. A State Department draft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report still set the number of likely Kosovar Albanian deaths at "over 8,000."

Investigators have probably cherry-picked the most likely large mass graves. Serbian forces probably did truck some bodies to Serbia for disposal in, for example, smelters. But could that have been more than a couple of thousand, without leaving a trail of evidence that has so far not appeared? The press has reported on most of the larger graves that KFOR has found. And we know that several thousand Albanian Kosovars were taken to Serbian prisons during the war, are still being held and are gradually being accounted for. Given the number of ICTY-identified sites and the tribunal's findings so far, a reasonable guess of the Albanian dead lies somewhere between 2,000 and 4,000.

By the standards of its own humanitarian argument, Chomsky points out, NATO accomplished nothing or less than nothing. Largely in response to NATO bombing, Serbs killed a few thousand Albanian civilians; to even the score NATO killed a few thousand Serb civilians while, incidentally, clocking Yugoslavia's economic infrastructure. Chomsky ridicules the notion that bombing was meant to stop the Serbs' forcible expulsion of Albanians or that it did anything but accelerate the process—although these expulsions, which were televised around the world, did generate support for NATO's bombing campaign. Chomsky lambastes Administration claims that without bombing, the Serbs would have committed more and worse atrocities. He provides important corrections to conventional wisdom regarding the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's monitoring mission in place before the bombing, underappreciated by Washington, and he documents Serbia's eagerness to seek a negotiated settlement that would have included a substantial international armed presence. He also notes, as have several others, that Rambouillet set up a pretext for bombing, but then he goes on to describe, as only a handful have, how it may well not have been the bombing that led to a settlement but rather a significant change in US demands, a more than face-saving compromise that shifted ultimate responsibility for deciding Kosovo's political future from NATO to the UN. Most thoughtful critics of the war—Michael Mandelbaum's article this fall in *Foreign Affairs* comes to mind—unfortunately missed this point, which is essential to understanding not only recent history but also the ongoing dynamics of Serb-NATO exchanges.

Chomsky speculates that Washington initiated the NATO war in order to boost NATO's credibility, not in a positive sense but as an arch-demonstration of power. Serbia, Chomsky writes, "was an annoyance, an unwelcome impediment to Washington's efforts to complete its substantial takeover of Europe." Furthermore, "as long as Serbia is not incorporated within U.S.-dominated domains, it makes sense to punish it for failure to conform—very visibly, in a way that will serve as a warning to others that might be similarly inclined." The theme of a rogue superpower serves as the basis for many illuminating comparisons regarding US abuse of power, directly or by way of clients, in Vietnam, Laos, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Colombia, Cuba, Guatemala, Haiti, Palestine, East Timor, Iraq and Turkey, to name a few. Given, for example, that US actions have steadily encouraged the Turks to persecute the Kurds, it would be inconsistent, Chomsky argues, indeed irrational, to give any credence at all to a general claim that US policy is guided by benevolent humanitarian impulses, and the same holds for any such claim about Kosovo. One by one his examples could be debated separately according to the exigencies of circumstance; taken together, they form a damning indictment.

In today's world the flip side of high-tech bullying is a mad scramble among small states to acquire weapons of mass destruction for their own protection. Proliferation, Chomsky points out in an extended aside, will be one of many unpleasant aftereffects of NATO's war. With some embarrassment, one wonders whether, after the North Koreans sell their missiles and the Russians their bombs, Washington will reconsider the gusto with which it launches military operations.

A less tangible but no less important logical consequence of NATO's unprovoked assault on Yugoslavia is the dangerous precedent this sets for international law. Chomsky says that

> in the real world, there are two options: (1) Some kind of framework of world order, perhaps the U.N. Charter, the International Court of Justice, and other existing institutions, or perhaps something better if it can be devised and broadly accepted. (2) The powerful do as they wish, expecting to receive the accolades that are the prerogative of power.

This is quite right. More specifically, what the world has now is, on the one hand, the Westphalian system as it evolved after 1648, with its core insight that sovereign states must mind their own business when

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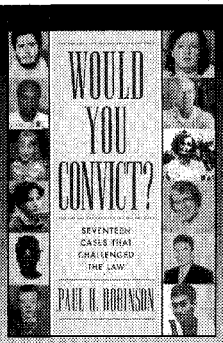
it comes to each other's internal affairs, and, on the other, the notion that some doctrine of moral imperatives (or the illusion of such) may justify intervention. The two views are mutually exclusive, notwithstanding recent efforts by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and others to meld them. Even the systems of discourse these paradigms employ to justify themselves operate on entirely different levels. The Westphalian view is pragmatic, rational, concerned with avoiding war; humanitarian interventionism is quasi-religious, unapproachable except through belief. Choosing between them depends upon how one feels getting out of bed. Except now the world learns that it doesn't have much of a choice—we're taking a giant leap backward, some 350 years.

One can, perhaps, define modernity as the evolution of the awareness and appreciation of individuality. In this matter, "humanitarian intervention" represents a significant leap backward. Arguing, in extreme form, not only a right but a duty to intervene, it rejects the gray area of international humanitarian law that applies to individuals, as practiced, say, by the International Committee of the Red Cross. Neutrality is out, while co-belligerency is in. The first to suffer will be individuals who otherwise may have had recourse to some limited, painstakingly created international protections. It's worth recalling that the humanitarian interventionist argument has its modern roots in the Biafra crisis of the late sixties. Francophone groups in particular, and those who would form Doctors Without Borders, argued that aid agencies had to take sides. France, of course, wanted to take sides, in part to secure lucrative oil-lifting rights. For its own reasons the United States decided to take sides in Yugoslavia. The trend is clear enough: We are moving from somewhat successful efforts to moderate or defuse violence, efforts based on enlightened notions of individual rights, toward approving and channeling violence for group ends.

But let's face it, most people who observed the Kosovo conflict didn't suspect they might themselves be victims of a massive government and media disinformation campaign. Moreover, a theoretical or comparative argument wouldn't have seemed particularly persuasive coming from the initiated, who themselves rightly remain puzzled about whether or how to vest abominable government misbehavior with a collective conscious volition. No, the thing that got people's attention was that those articulating the policy seemed to enjoy just a



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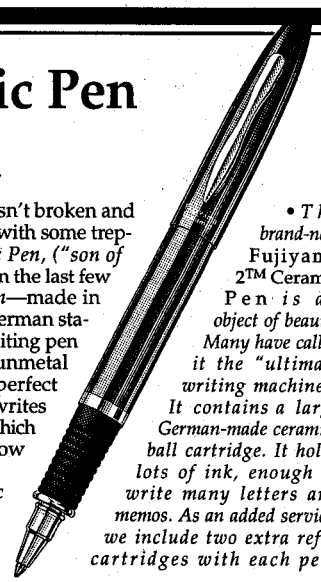

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little too much the misery they were causing. The twitchy rantings of US Gen. Wesley Clark, the NATO supreme commander. The snide egoism of Madeleine Albright's amanuensis, Jamie Rubin, and his puckish NATO counterpart, Jamie Shea. What a cast of characters! What an extravaganza! A small group at the pinnacle of power set out capriciously to destroy a small country, succeeded and relished every minute of it. The public recognized the smell of evil. How many kids, indeed, did NATO kill?

In fact, there was quite a lot of dissent brewing about the war. Even the mainstream media voiced doubts. Chomsky barely mentions this, doesn't make anything of it and maybe wasn't aware of it except unconsciously in a feeling of reproach: the public coming to the right conclusions for the wrong reasons. Nevertheless, there were hopeful signs of a nascent antiwar movement, one that could have taken to the streets in large numbers if the war had continued. This suggests that establishment power has real limits, that the public has a moral sense of fair play—you could have read that into news from Seattle lately, too. People knew that Kosovo was not an immaculate mistake: The war sprang from a series of bad decisions, and different decisions could have cut it off. There was a way out, after all.

Chomsky's splendid critique demands attention for many reasons, but above all for the questions in it he already thinks answered. How could this happen? Can't we devise laws to regulate properly the conduct of foreign policy? Why do intelligent people in the press tell one another lies? How do we know, really, when we're doing something wrong? Chomsky, described by the science writer Martin Gardner as a "mysterian"—that is, one who believes we never will have answers to explain human consciousness or the creative powers of the human mind—may think not all these questions are worth asking; that only macro-policy and global effects deserve investigation. True, by their nature, questions of practical ethics have no definitive answers. Human beings will continue asking them, though, because we know from experience that in different historical times and places asking about the right moral procedure leads to better and better approximations of the truth, and because it is in our genes to be very afraid of what may happen if we don't. ■

Exploding Plastic Inevitable

JOANNE JACOBSON

TUPPERWARE: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America.
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Joanne Jacobson is writing a memoir about growing up Jewish in suburban America in the fifties. She teaches American literature and American studies at Yeshiva University.

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designed and marketed with large ambitions: the "total 'Tupperization' of American homes." Modernized by Tupperware, domestic life would take up a new future, presided over by the resourceful, efficient American "hostess" wielding an expanding palette of consumer goods on behalf of family and hospitality. "Through an act of genius and alchemy," Alison Clarke intones in the same mythologizing spirit, "Earl Tupper summoned forth a divine creation to benefit humanity."

Earl Tupper conceived his life's work in the high Franklinian terms of self-improvement and social reform. Self-educated and self-made like Franklin, Tupper kept attentive track of his diet and exercise regimes as well as his progress as an inventor, and he dabbled in schemes for social change, including a utopian theme park. From being a struggling worker in a rural family business, Tupper managed to remake himself into a successful innovator, entrepreneur and, eventually, corporate leader. Tupper worked in the thirties for a New England plastics manufacturer that encouraged him to use company resources to experiment on his own time with ideas for molded-plastic products. By 1939 Tupper had founded his own company; by the early forties he was designing his own plastic housewares, using a versatile new form of polyethylene that had originally been developed for wartime industries. Tupper's great innovation (for which he applied for a patent in 1947) was the "Tupper seal," based on the inversion of a paint-can lid, which created an air- and liquid-tight closure (emitting the famous "Tupperware burp") and became the core of a mass-producible system of unbreakable, stackable, generic containers in a variety of "sculptural" shapes. The Tupper seal "transformed the product from a flexible plastic bowl to a patentable technological form"—and made it possible for Tupper to project his entire line of products as exemplars of a social ideal that combined beauty, affordability and efficiency—to, in effect, bring modernity within reach of the average household.

Alison Clarke makes an interesting and largely convincing case for Tupperware's negotiation of a path between old and new during these years of anxious transition. Most plainly, Tupperware's promise of "sealed-in freshness" enlisted modern materials and design on behalf of the intrinsically conservative mission of preservation. Tupperware pieces like "Patio Partners" and "TV Tumblers" were designed to fit a new generation of social occasions (barbecues, buffets, cocktail parties) and to serve a new generation of recipes, like "Chuck Wagon Casserole," that encouraged convenience and spoke of affluence—while at the same time encouraging the thrifty use of leftovers. In this way, Clarke argues, "the Tupperware ethos circumscribed the contradictions of thrift and excess, decorum and caprice."

It was without a doubt the innovation of the "Tupperware party" that gave the products their most organic access to American domestic life. The Tupperware party fit perfectly the shifting social, economic and emotional conditions of the great postwar migration to suburbia. Door-to-door sales by the Fuller Brush Company, the Electrolux Corporation, Stanley Home Products and Avon Products had already by the early fifties staked a commercial claim on the intimate turf of suburban America, whose homogeneous middle-class population offered "an abundant supply of easily targeted consumers." In a culture of newcomers, the Tupperware party was "the ideal home-based networking opportunity for a newly displaced population." Against the backdrop of still tenuous neighborhoods, Tupperware parties created a ready-to-use, ritualized occasion for entertainment—complete with a designated social leader, a repertoire of activities and a "Get-Acquainted Set" of shared objects—that filled a social vacuum for women isolated at home with young children and, at the same time, transformed consumption itself into a party.

The Tupperware enterprise bespoke a vision of attainable happiness that is well entrenched in our national mythology.

Some of Clarke's most suggestive analysis focuses on the women-only environment of the Tupperware party and, especially, of the Tupperware system of dealerships. According to Clarke, in blurring "domesticity and commerce, work and leisure, friend and colleague, consumer and employee" the entire Tupperware project managed to forge a new, uncertain amalgam that charted an ambiguous course of change for women.

The "Tupperware party" was actually not the idea of Earl Tupper. A single mother from Detroit, Brownie Wise, caught Tupper's attention with the "Patio Parties" at which she was successfully selling Tupperware and other plastic houseware products in homes. Wise's sales figures were so dramatic that in 1951 Tupper decided to withdraw Tupperware from retail sales venues and focus his entire operation on Tupper Home Parties (THP)—which he appointed Wise herself to direct.

Brownie Wise embodied the dramatic opportunities for women's advancement within THP's direct-sales system, and she was tirelessly promoted (and self-promoted) as their exemplar. The company gave to women—like Wise—without business experience or resources an empowering chance to break into the commercial economy and a chance to rise, through sales and recruitment, to managerial positions within the company. In 1954 Brownie Wise became the first woman to appear on the cover of *Business Week*. Wise publicly celebrated her achievement of power and wealth, cultivating "the image of a single, middle-aged woman presiding over an expansive lake estate, complete with island, cabin cruiser, and livestock, all attained without the support or intervention of a man." Women at Tupper Home Parties were "openly encouraged to consider their jobs as potentially serious career prospects"; to believe that "Tupperware could transport women to a world beyond the confines of thrifty homemaking, 'making do'" and "part-time work for 'pin money'"; and ultimately, like Brownie Wise, to "transgress the limitations experienced by the majority of her female contemporaries."

And yet "at least 75 percent of the THP executives were male"—decisively capping women's "infiltration" beneath a familiar glass ceiling. The fact that the company never offered job security to its virtually all-female legions of salespeople, dealers and managers—who remained entirely "self-employed, nonsalaried"—undercut the promise of independent entrepreneurship extended to women by THP. And if Tupperware parties offered women a chance to change their economic status on the familiar ground of domestic life, the party system also reconfirmed the domestic boundaries of women's economic destiny.

An elaborate system of prizes and gift-giving created a communal atmosphere at the company that reinforced these gender ambiguities. Party hostesses were thanked with pieces of Tupperware; at annual "Jubilees" at THP headquarters in the fifties, dealers gathered to dig for lavish hidden prizes, including mink stoles and diamond rings; a "Tupperware wish fairy, complete with tiara, gold tutu, and magic wand," fulfilled lucky hostesses' and dealers' dreams of musical instruments, toys and clothes for their children, and new furniture for

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their homes. Perhaps, as Clarke suggests, disguising the commercial realities of the employer-employee relationship made it possible for Tupper Home Parties to "deflect...criticism of women subsuming the role of breadwinner"; more likely, it seems to me, this distortion created one more unseen obstacle to women's full-fledged entry into the market economy. And yet Tupperware's engagement of its female employees as willing, passionate partners in excitement and wonder seems undeniable. In one photograph from the Smithsonian archives, the "Tupper-ette" water-ski team is performing in the mid-fifties at a national sales rally—wearing painted Tupperware containers as helmets. The astonishing conversion of Tupperware itself from an ordinary commodity into an instrument of celebration and ritual ceremony seems at once like a bad joke played on women and an epiphany of faith in the transformative power of objects.

Unlikely as it may now seem, the entire Tupperware enterprise—affordable, long-lasting household goods; opportunities for those outside the economic elite to see the work ethic pay off; a social bulwark against the anomie of half-built places—confirmed an Enlightenment vision of the attainability of human happiness that has had a long life in the national mythology of American success. That mythology had to stretch over the tight, needy surface of fear and suspicion during the early cold war years. And what could more viscerally embody the Franklinian vision of America's fortuitous elasticity than plastic? In an era of paint-by-number kits, can-opener cuisine and do-it-yourself home-improvement projects, Tupperware took its place in a roster of things reconstituted from at-hand materials that promised to bring transformation within reach—exactly as Franklin and Thoreau had promised in their own precisely charted narratives.

In a world of unparalleled, inequitably distributed material richness, we live today, most of us, in an environment of cynicism about *things*. Perhaps that cynicism is at the heart of what makes the fifties glow in the retro light of longing. Similarly, at the end of *The Great Gatsby*, Nick mourned Jay Gatsby's miraculous, doomed responsiveness to the lost explorers' dream of the "fresh green breast of the new world," before which, he imagined from the equally cynical vantage point of the twenties, "man must have held his breath...face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder." So much about Earl Tupper's ambition seems laughable now—he actually broke with Brownie Wise when he discovered that she had betrayed the company's dignity by using a Tupperware bowl as a dog-food dish—and yet one is reluctant, I think, to turn too arrogantly away from his embodiment of the lost credibility of dreaming in things. ■

THEATER

Sex and the City

DAVID YAFFE

IN THE BLOOD. By Suzan-Lori Parks. Public Theatre.

Does the world really need a contemporary retelling of *The Scarlet Letter*? Last year, Americans didn't need to leave home to be treated to a frightening reworking of Hawthorne's tale of adultery and hypocritical judgment, in the impeachment trial of Bill Clinton. But Suzan-Lori Parks's *In the Blood* is not a response to Clinton's legacy of '98—which seems practically ancient now, anyway—but to the more lasting effects of his legacy of '96: his politically motivated move to "end welfare as we know it."

Parks's Hester Prynne (played by Charlayne Woodard) could be a propaganda piece for defenders *or* opponents of the welfare state. A homeless mother of five slipping through the safety net, this Hester is unresponsive to the assistance she desperately needs. With Hawthorne's tale moved up a few centuries to the present day, the stigma has shifted from the sin of adultery to the perpetuation of abject poverty. Casual sex is no problem in Parks's world, as long as you can afford it.

The most successful updatings of classic literary texts are not works that compete with the original but rather ones offering a surprising riff on it. Whether it's Derek Walcott's postcolonial Homer in *Omeros*, Cole Porter's dandified Shakespeare in *Kiss Me Kate* or Amy Heckerling's valley-girl Austen in *Clueless*, a great revision stands on its own when it offers pleasures that respond to the original in a way that feels spontaneous. Suzan-Lori Parks clearly has the equipment to respond to *The Scarlet Letter*, and has the ear for the vernacular to make it new. (She originally titled her play *Fucking A*.) Henry James attacked Hawthorne's allegory as "overdone at times," "mechanical" and "in danger of crossing the line that separates the sublime from its intimate neighbor," but the case is not so clear-cut. The word "adultery" goes unmentioned for the entire book, and when the out-of-wedlock daughter, Pearl, finally asks Hester the meaning of the scarlet A, all we are told is that it is worn "for the sake of its gold thread." The weaving of the tale is as ambiguous as Hester's explanation. Hawthorne never moralizes about the adulterous affair between Hester and the Rev. Arthur Dimmesdale, which Hester believes "has a consecration of its own."

Parks's allegories have also been hard to pin down, and it is precisely this indeterminacy that allows her characters to transcend mere political symbolism. In *Venus*, we are as engaged and tickled by the freak show as we are horrified by the brutalization of the title character. In her screenplay for Spike Lee's *Girl 6*, we are drawn in to the title character's sensual life, only to be jolted by her masochistic victimization. In both cases, the pleasures pull as much as the images of sexualized humiliation repel. But Richard Foreman's funhouse aesthetic provided much of the delight in the staging of *Venus*, and the thrills of the uneven *Girl 6* had as much to do with Lee's ongoing sexual carnival as it did with Parks's earnest concerns for the exploitation of African-American women. Parks—who called an early play *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World*—is at her allegorical best when her language attacks with a Stein-like repetitive minimalism, and her story is imbued with a nightmarish absurdity.

So it is unfortunate to report that *In the Blood* strays from Hawthorne without a coherent plan for rebellion. Unlike Foreman and Lee, whose distinctive visions complemented Parks's, director David Esbjornson seemed only to instruct his actors to do a lot of yelling and screaming. Our first glimpse of Parks's Hester La Negrita is in

David Yaffe, who teaches English at Hunter College, is working on a book about jazz and American literature.

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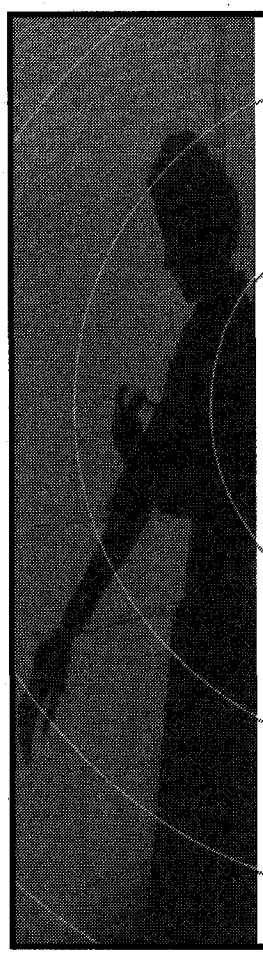
front of an alley with the graffitied word "Slut" decorating her makeshift home. A chorus, including the Reverend D (Reggie Montgomery), The Welfare Lady (Gail Grate), The Doctor (Bruce MacVittie) and an assortment of bastards, descends upon her with invectives like "She don't got no skills 'cept one," "Move aside! What she got's catchy!" and simply "Hopeless!" Although the Reverend D, like Hawthorne's Dimmesdale, fathered Hester's child (in Parks's version, one of five children), his spiteful refusal to support her is more in the spirit of the villainous Roger Chillingworth than the benign but ultimately spineless Dimmesdale. By shifting Hawthorne's Puritan hypocrisy to a general air of hostility and rudeness, Hester's entire world is as hopeless as her own prospects. When the welfare caseworker gives Hester a golden fabric to weave into an evening gown, she is not, like Hawthorne's Hester, given an opportunity to be an artist but farms the work out to a prostitute.

The relentless cruelty is, of course, centered around sex, and in five monologues dubbed "confessions" we are treated to tales of Hester's rapacious sexuality. The nameless doctor who took advantage of his needy client described Hester as "very giving, very motherly, very obliging, very understanding, very phenomenal." The caseworker identified simply as Welfare Lady describes the "thrill" of a threesome with Hester and her husband. It seems that no one encounters Parks's Hester without a sexual epiphany, and yet not once are we shown a glimpse of what a firebrand she can be. Like the world of the Puritans Hawthorne mocked in his novel, the world of *In the Blood* is devoid of sensual pleasure. The play hardly fares better with pathos: Charlayne Woodard's Hester writhes around in agony, weeps, screams and utters "bitch" with streetwise conviction, yet her plight remains conceptual.

At the beginning of "Rappaccini's Daughter," Hawthorne writes of the defects of allegory, "which is apt to invest... plots and characters with aspect of scenery and people in the clouds and to steal away the human warmth out of [one's] conceptions." To infuse that warmth, Hawthorne layered his allegory with enough complexity to acknowledge the human mystery beneath the symbols of a morality tale. In contrast to Hawthorne's sin that dared not speak its name, not only is the scrawled word "slut" repeated aloud ad infinitum but descriptions of sex acts are as detailed—and as repetitive—as the Starr report. When La Negrita declares to the Welfare Lady, "I don't think the world



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likes women much," we are not delivered a particularly original political slogan. It's not that theater and politics are incompatible, as Brecht and Miller have shown. "Whenever there are great virtues, it's a sure sign something's wrong," said Mother Courage, more aphorist than sloganeer.

In the play's climax, Parks's Hester does not, like Hawthorne's heroine, return from exile to take solace in a sorority of women but, after losing a chance to marry the dapper Chilli (Rob Campbell), bludgeons her 13-year-old son, Jabber (also Rob Campbell), after he repeats the forbidden word "slut" one too many times. Now the jury can condemn Hester with impunity. Now they no longer look heartless and racist as they tell the illiterate homeless mother of five to make something of herself. Hester—in the hands of Hawthorne a protofeminist icon and antipuritanical heroine of sexual freedom—is guilty of infanticide and unrepentant to boot. "I never shoulda had 'em!" screams Hester in a gestalt that must have derived from an intense workshop. "No," she concludes. "I shoulda had a hundred! I shoulda had a hundred thousand! A whole army I shoulda!" With the red blood of the play's title oozing from her son's head, she scrawls the letter "A," the only letter she ever learned how to write. Instead of Hester Prynne, we get Susan Smith. *F—ing A.* ■

FILMS

Rock in a Hard Place

STUART KLAWANS

CRADLE WILL ROCK

Not since Charlton Heston painted the Sistine Chapel has there been so epic a film about arts patronage as *Cradle Will Rock*. Heston, you will recall, had to cope only with the Vatican. But in Tim Robbins's ambitious new movie about power, politics and culture—set in the thirties, but unambiguously directed toward the present moment—artists must satisfy a whole range of paymasters, from Rockefeller to the federal government.

With the insouciance that epic filmmaking demands, Robbins has dumped the contents of 1932–38 into the single drawer of '37, so that *Cradle Will Rock* may jingle with incident. Here, as the film's title would suggest, is an account of the legendary opening-night performance of Marc Blitzstein's proletarian opera, *The Cradle Will Rock*: a work first produced by the government and then presented in defiance of it. Here, too, is the grilling of Hallie Flanagan, head of the WPA's Federal Theatre, by the House Un-American Activities Committee (an interrogation that took place a year and a half after *Cradle*'s premiere); and here, from three years before *Cradle*, is the story of Diego Rivera's mural painting, with head of Lenin, for the RCA Building: a work first created and then destroyed by Rockefeller money.

Also wandering through the film are William Randolph Hearst with his film-world protégée Marion Davies; a composite industrialist, who is eager to trade steel and Old Master paintings with Mussolini; a ditzy countess, who keeps a pet "composer" right out of *My Man Godfrey*; and various art workers, from Federal Theatre actor Howard Da Silva (here fictionalized as one Aldo Silvano) to a drunken ventriloquist who is fading away with vaudeville.

Clearly the moviegoer, as patron of the arts, gets a lot for the price of a ticket. At least, there's a lot on the surface. Characterizations for the most part are broad—inspired, perhaps, by Blitzstein's dramaturgy. (The movie's steel magnate might as well have been named after the opera's villain, Mr. Mister.) Juxtapositions of episodes are often bold, as in the Cubist space of Rivera's mural. If there's a unifying element to these cartoonlike pieces, it's the light and color of cinematographer Jean Yves Escoffier, who gives everything a sumptuousness that's just slightly antique. His skill with cranes and dollies also helps a lot when smoothing is called for—as in the opening sequence, which carries us, as if in one gesture, from down-on-her-luck Olive Stanton (Emily Watson) sleeping in a theater, to disgruntled, anti-Communist bureaucrat Hazel Huffman (Joan Cusack) pasting up fliers on the street, to the apartment where Blitzstein (Hank Azaria) is lacerating his fingers on the piano keys, torturing from himself the score of *The Cradle Will Rock*.

Watch that sequence well. It's one of the few in *Cradle Will Rock* where Tim Robbins brings his characters together in a continuous space. To describe the movie is to ask why he prefers to keep them apart.

An answer to that question might begin with the two characters (out of some twenty major roles) who are presented as thinking, caring, attractive people. One of them is the impoverished actor Aldo Silvano (John Turturro). It's obvious why Robbins likes him. He's the trouper who never belittles the role of Fourth Scholar in *Doctor Faustus* and never holds up a rehearsal, even when shuttling to Brooklyn to care for his growing family. A movie star and producer-director such as Tim Robbins couldn't exist without the Silvanos of this world; and so, through this character, he shows them a decent respect.

The other character who's fully formed is Hallie Flanagan (Cherry Jones): an arts bureaucrat who is calm, intelligent, well informed and eclectic in her tastes. Had Flanagan not existed, it would have been necessary to invent her, so that Aldo Silvano might have what the Federal Theatre represents in this movie: the prospect of steady, honorable work at decent pay.

Without such a prospect, as *Cradle Will Rock* insists, artists serve as prostitutes. To account for the variety of streetwalkers and courtesans on display, we now need to step back from this film and look at an earlier, somewhat different movie project.

In 1984, the year before his death, Orson Welles wrote his own account of the premiere of the Blitzstein opera, which he and John Houseman had produced at the Federal Theatre's Project 891. Welles's screenplay (which was published after his death) is of course a fiction, whose closeness to reality is only relative compared with Robbins's work. Even so, Welles was there and Robbins was not; and so it's instructive to read the almost-firsthand version.

The year, as I mentioned, was 1937, and Welles was 22. In Chicago, policemen had just shot to death ten strikers at Republic Steel, while in New York, Welles and Houseman were about to present an explicitly Marxist musical—*The Cradle Will Rock*—about a strike in Steeltown, USA.

This coincidence of art with life did not escape the notice of Congress, whose conservative members, like comedians, can always boast of good timing. Four days before the opening, they shut down the production. When Project 891 went ahead with a final dress rehearsal, armed guards showed up to padlock the theater.

Yet *Cradle* opened anyway. According to Welles's screenplay, Blitzstein proposed that the show could be done without

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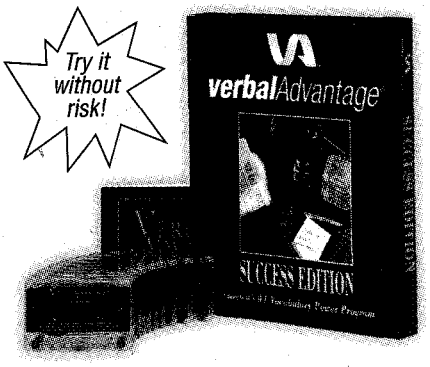

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costumes, sets or an orchestra. This suggestion launched Houseman on a mad, heroic scramble to rent a theater privately, with an upright piano for Blitzstein. Then, when Actors Equity ruled that no performer would be allowed onstage, Welles provided a final stroke of improvisatory genius, reminding the company of our "constitutional right to stand up and sing wherever we'd like to"—for example, from the seats of the theater.

Welles's screenplay does not dwell on the resulting triumph. Nor does it glorify the "boy" (as he calls himself) who directed the show. The screenplay is mostly an act of soul-searching—eloquent, flamboyant, amused soul-searching, of course—and a tribute to Blitzstein, to whom the script is dedicated.

Here is how Welles describes the composer: "Serious rather than solemn, he brightens a room when he enters it. His political beliefs are like moral convictions but they are held with the most perfect serenity. A total stranger to extravagance in any form, he is mannerly, widely educated, unaffectedly civilized, a man of natural authority and unstudied charm. It never occurs to him that his mere presence is a kind of rebuke to the rest of us."

So much for the Welles version. In the film that Robbins wrote and directed, we have instead a sweaty and unshaven Blitzstein: jerky of movements, hollow of eyes, given to hallucinatory dialogues with conscience-tormenting figures (such as his dead wife and Bertolt Brecht). Brighten a room? This guy would more likely clear it.

What about Houseman? In the screenplay, Welles introduces his great collaborator and enemy with these words: "Now in his early thirties he conveys an impression of greater age by virtue of a magisterial air, wholly natural and unforced, and already impressive." In sum, a highly capable man—unlike Cary Elwes in *Cradle Will Rock*, whose characterization of Houseman amounts to a lift of the nose and a dangle of the wrists.

As for Welles himself: He liked to say that a director is someone who "presides over accidents." We hear in this remark a characteristic chuckle of false modesty. All of us live amid the crash of entropy—but very few, as Welles knew, can make the pieces fall into patterns.

Those happy souls do not include the bellowing, arm-waving drunk in *Cradle Will Rock*. This Welles (Angus Macfadyen) just happens to be in the neighborhood when shows get produced. And why are they put up? He doesn't much care. To judge from this man's roarings about a theater of sensation, you would not guess that the real Welles gave his time and energy to the Spanish Loyalists, that he chose to collaborate with Blitzstein on other occasions (including a benefit for *New Masses* and a production of *Julius Caesar* updated to Fascist Italy), that he abandoned RKO to make a documentary about Brazilian workers.

I find it curious that Welles, Houseman and Blitzstein—people who were fully as intelligent and committed as Hallie Flanagan—should appear as caricatures in *Cradle Will Rock*. The first two resemble the news media's version of Karen Finley. They're scandal-making elitists who take advantage of a federal program and by their irresponsibility contribute to its ruin. Blitzstein is not much better. Like the media's image of a politically correct academic, he's a wretched ideologue, trapped inside his own head.

If Diego Rivera fares better in the film, it's largely because the role has gone to Ruben Blades. Like the real Blitzstein, he is a kind of rebuke to those around him. No other actor in *Cradle Will Rock* stands up to Blades's cunning, anger and irrepressible glee—though these qualities are put in the service of another cartoonlike scheme. It's true that Nelson Rockefeller (John Cusack) bought Rivera's services, then dumped him as if he were a disobedient whore. But the movie goes further. At the end, all but rubbing his hands with cupidity, Rockefeller declares he will now promote abstract art—it's better for business.

I would be the last to defend the Butcher of Attica; yet I note that Picasso's *Guernica* found a home in Rockefeller's Museum of Modern Art. (So, too, did Rivera's bloodthirsty *Agrarian Leader, Zapata.*) So maybe the relationship between artist and private patron is more interesting out in the world than it is in *Cradle Will Rock*. Certainly the relationship between Welles and a short-lived system of public patronage was richer than the film lets on.

Robbins wants to protect his art workers and honest bureaucrats from such complexities. I suppose that's why he constructs a thematic montage for his characters rather than freeing them to interact. Maybe he also wants to protect the good people from himself. Like Welles, he is a writer-director-producer-star. Is that why he makes Orson an ass—because he's ashamed of his own success, working for private paymasters? If so, I wish he'd think again. As a star, he does a lot for the troupers—including giving them work in a project that may be a little clunky but doesn't entail prostitution.

Lighten up, Tim Robbins. Your heart's in the right place. Now move your head. ■

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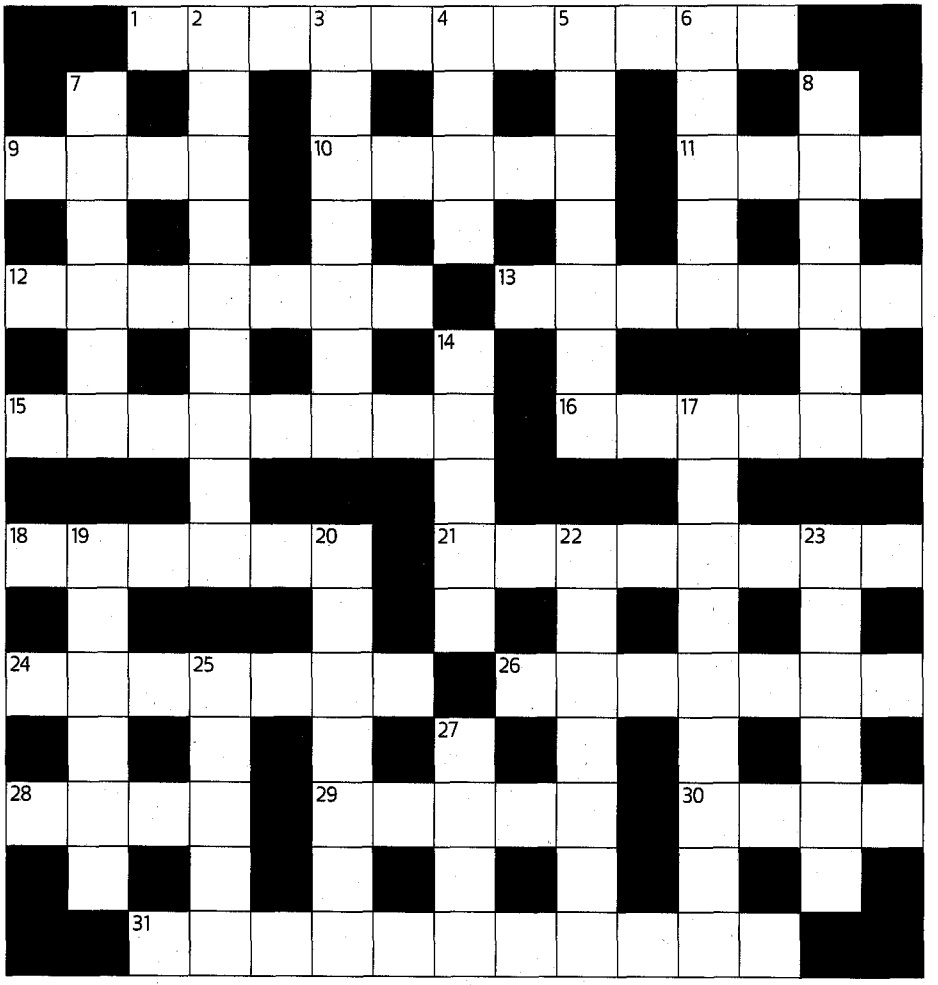

ACROSS

1 and **16** across You won't have to suffer such as this on an empty stomach! (5-6,6)

9, 11 and **10** It's the most common form of nickel you might come across. (4-4,5)

12 This might border on a maneuver to insure that all possibilities are covered. (7)

13 One usually does such things on sloping surfaces, perhaps all moss-covered. (7)

15 Something like "America" includes a violent dislike, with a conclusion. (8)

16 See 1

18 and **23** down Recommended as that morning-after dosage. (4,2,3,3)

21 One uses it to keep the last part first, perhaps, but waiters often warn you of it. (3-5)

24 Ship out the often-heard alternative. (5,2)

26 Caught, often with unpleasant results. (7)

28 and **29** One that reputedly coats panes with common money and ransacked forts. (4,5)

30 Perhaps a crowbar in the case of an intruder, showing what one hopes to get in return. (4)

31 Sounds like entirely correct openings to the fence, especially when growing things. (11)

DOWN

2 Concerning something inside the warrior which might carry a heavy load. (9)

3 West Indian drums are found in the British river—a wide stretch of it. (7)

4 One hears this is passed on as having been given more than a touch of color. (4)

5 Such points are not quite unnecessary! (7)

6 Sounds as though it could be made of ten and fifty, to be better than most. (5)

7 Babe in the movies took time to get the bird where we can hear the dialect. (6)

8 Pertaining to a writer of aphorisms—or perhaps pertaining to the little people! (6)

14 Has trouble when father is around, being a Turkish big shot. (5)

17 The folded hinge lent a way to make things clear. (9)

19 Pretty trashy art, as what is left of the cigar has the ability to show. (6)

20 One might do it to pillows with a bad condition to puff up. (5,2)

22 A wee one not usually thought of as a small drink. (4,3)

23 See 18 across

25 One does things in a small way, especially if carrying a rather old weapon. (5)

27 Want something bad but not just for a short time? (4)

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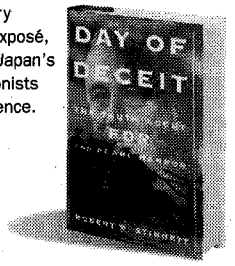

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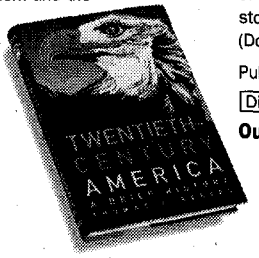

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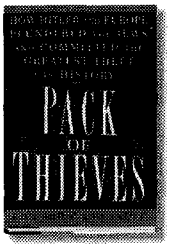

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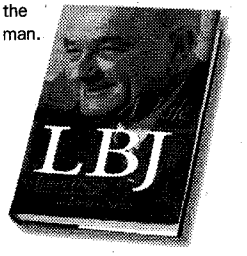

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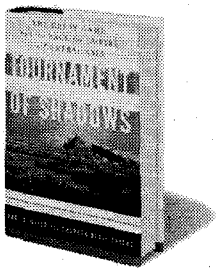

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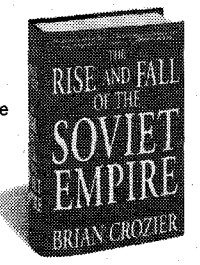

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